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FIRST DIVISION AREA, VIETNAM--A serious question regarding the credibility of an American military announcement about North Vietnamese troop infiltration south of the 17th parallel has been raised by South Vietnamese generals.

The official American statement minimizing reports of infiltration here has been sharply contradicted by South Vietnamese officers in this mountainous, 2-province area bordering both Laos and North Vietnam where the infiltration has been concentrated.

On July 14, a top U. S. military spokesman (informatively only-- chief of staff Stillwell) at a specially convened press conference handed reporters a prepared statement--which had been at least checked by the American Embassy--reading "there are no indications of the presence of any PAVN (People's Army of North Vietnam) units on South Vietnamese soil."

However, only the day before Premier General Nguyen Khanh in an exclusive interview ~~said~~ described the infiltration as "overt invasion" and explained, "Before we had the problem of infiltration and subversion. Now we have whole units coming in from North Vietnam. Before they (North Vietnam) took soldiers from south of the 17th parallel and sent them back. Now we find for the first time we caught prisoners who were born in North Vietnam."

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The North Vietnamese prisoners—the first ones captured in the war, he said—were ~~the first~~ concrete proof of Hanoi's involvement in the <sup>gu</sup> guerrilla movement in the South.

The U. S. military statement—followed two days later by a similar one from ~~Secreta~~ Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in Washington—raises a question which is troubling many <sup>ost</sup> observers here: What was the evidence on which the U. S. statement was based? Was the statement an example of "managed news?"

If, for example, Washington ~~is admitted~~ acknowledged that Hanoi was escalating the five-year-old war against anti-Communist Vietnam, would Washington be forced ~~there~~ therefore to retaliate against North Vietnam as Administration officials had threatened to do last month. Or did the American statement reflect a more cautious and less emotional analysis than the publicly expressed views of <sup>Premier</sup> Prime Minister Khanh and his generals? Khanh last weekend called for direct attacks on North Viet Nam.

On-the-spot investigation by this report reporter in First Division area, comprising the two northernmost provinces, discloses that:

~~REF~~  
1. Prior to issuance of the U. S. military statement on July 14 and the Washington statement on July 16, ~~no American official had interviewed any of the~~ ~~understanding~~ North Vietnamese prisoners seized by government forces during the previous eight days. In fact, American field officers conceded they did not even know how many North Vietnamese prisoners had been captured. (A Vietnamese intelligence report listed three; this correspondent saw two.)

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2. Since American officials had not interviewed the North Vietnamese prisoners and hence had no independent source of judgment, they were forced to rely primarily on prisoner interrogation reports prepared by Vietnamese military officers. These "initial" reports, averaging four pages per prisoner, dealt primarily with immediate tactical information.

3. U. S. military officials demonstrated a selective credibility by accepting one part of one report as accurate—namely that two Russian helicopters had ferried troops from North Vietnam into Laos and that these troops had then marched across the border into South Vietnam.

4. <sup>BUT</sup> Other sections of the interrogation reports were discounted or ~~ignored~~ by American military officials as lacking substantiation.

During a ~~three-day~~ <sup>one</sup> visit to the 1st Division area, this reporter interviewed ~~on~~ <sup>one</sup> North Vietnamese prisoner for three hours and discussed with division commander Sub-Brig. Gen. ~~N~~ <sup>one</sup> (one-star) ~~Nguyen C~~ <sup>one</sup> Nguyen Chanh Thi and his intelligence staff the testimony of the prisoners. These staff officers openly ~~criticized~~ <sup>criticized</sup> the American officialdom for being "too slow and sticking too close to form."

"The Americans weren't even interested in these prisoners," Gen. Thi exploded. (Informatively only—he used a four-letter word to describe the Americans). "None of the American advisors here speak Vietnamese, but the American consul (in Hue) does. He wouldn't even condescend to come here (to military headquarters) to interview them. We gave them (American military ~~adv~~ <sup>advisors</sup>) this report," he said ~~wavign~~ <sup>waving</sup> waving the brief prisoner interrogation report. "Maybe they translated it; maybe they didn't."

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"In May, 1964, he received the order to start the trip with his whole company. Other companies have not started the trip yet, but they may perhaps go later. This company is composed of draftees of 90 fighting men. All the cadre (El Note: generally meaning officers) stayed in the North. In addition to this company there's another company of 90 men which came South with his. So 180 men started moving south May/1964 by nine trucks from Nghe An to Dong Hoi ~~in~~ one day, making one overnight stop.

"At 6 a.m. the next day they were taken to the airfield of Dong Hoi and boarded a helicopter painted black. The helicopter carried 20 passengers. There were <sup>two</sup> ~~two~~ <sup>two</sup> ~~two~~ helicopters and each helicopter made four trips. Each ~~helicopter~~ trip took forty minutes. At about 2 o'clock in the afternoon all 180 had been transferred. The helicopter landed in the jungle in Laos. Location ~~was~~ unknown...."

During a 3-hour interview with this reporter, the prisoner confirmed and expanded upon this report. ~~This report is based on the prisoner's statement.~~

Several sections of the report were accepted by high-ranking American officials in Saigon and in the northern provinces: first that the prisoner was <sup>1/2</sup> bona fide; second that he flew to Laos in a Russian helicopter. They also accepted that the prisoner was a private—and that rank would indicate combat troops rather than Mr. McNamara's description of "cadre of individuals." Cadres generally mean military officers, political experts or military specialists.

<sup>U.S. Military</sup> <sup>Commissioners</sup> <sup>SHARPLY Contradict</sup>  
1. The Saigon statement and ~~McNamara~~ McNamara press conference ~~ignore~~ these fundamental parts of the reports:

1. The prisoner said he came to Vietnam with his own 90-man company along with another 90-man company. (More)

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The U. S. military statement reads that the infiltrators were "dispatched in small groups to South Viet Nam where they reportedly were to combine with existing local units to form new companies and battalions." Mr. McNamara indicated at his Washington press conference that he knew of no instances of infiltration of organized North Vietnamese units into the South Vietnamese war.

The prisoner interrogation report makes no mention of the entire 90-man company of the prisoner were <sup>COMPOSED</sup> was of North Vietnamese personnel <sup>BORN IN NORTH VIETNAM.</sup> ~~personnel~~ ~~trained in mixed packets~~ however, the U. S. military statement said they were trained in "mixed packets," indicating some were born in the North <sup>VIETNAM</sup> and some in South Viet Nam. <sup>THE</sup> (This prisoner told this correspondent all 90 men in his company spoke in North Vietnamese dialect.)

2. The prisoner identified himself with 6th company of the 7th battalion of the 325 division of the People's Army of Vietnam. The report lists names of its officers in the north. In the report states the prisoner moved into South Vietnam with the 90-men in the company with whom he was trained.

The U. S. military statement explains that though low-ranking infiltrators "continue to identify themselves with their parent unit in North Viet Nam," this "occasionally gives rise to false initial impressions that regular PAVN units have infiltrated into South Viet Nam."

The U. S. military statement also explains reads: "As far as can be determined, all former members of PAVN units and groups of men drawn from PAVN units <sup>SEVER</sup> ~~several~~ connections with their former units once they have

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infiltrated into South Viet Nam. Thus it can be said with a fair degree of probability that there are no <sup>3</sup> members of PAVN in the northern area areas of South Vietnam, for that matter, anywhere in South Viet Nam."

American intelligence ~~officers~~ procedures demand at least two pieces of evidence—such as prisoner report and a document—before they ~~do~~ may confirm the existence of a unit.

A similar, but oversimplified analogy analogy to the infiltration situation here might be something like this: suppose a 90-man company of American Army recruits, newly trained at Ft. Bragg, N. C., were dispatched on a special mission to Cuba, and broke all communications with Ft. Bragg.

Would there be a regular U. S. army unit on Cuban soil?

The Americans' version—based on the U. S. military statement in Saigon—would be no. But the Vietnamese version insists there would be. It is on this basis that Vietnamese PM premier Khanh labelled the situation as "an overt invasion."

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insert to page five after third para ~~x x x~~ or military specialists.

A rough analogy between the North Vietnamese private and  
McNamara's ~~calling the infiltrators~~ "cadre of individuals" would be that  
of the U. S. government sending American combat troops instead of  
advisors to South Viet Nam.

Pickup next para: The U. S. military statement xxf