

march 18, 1965

SAIGON--The most important general in South Vietnam is, ~~perhaps~~ perhaps, one that many have heard of but few have even seen.

His name is Major General Nguyen Don. He is the highest-ranking Communist commander in South Viet Nam; some Saigon officials speculate he will be named commander-in-chief of the Communist Viet Cong "Liberation Army"; if, ~~and when~~, it ever becomes a regular, conventional army.

General General Don commands the Communist Inter-Zone 5, which ~~cevere~~ covers the northern provinces of South Viet Nam where for the past month guerrilla forces re-inforced by North Vietnamese units have waged an impressive, but not entirely successful, offensive against government forces. They have with some consistently employed mobile warfare tactics--which are a step above usual guerrilla warfare tactics.

Much of this Communist offensive has come in General Don's home province of Binh Dinh, which some Saigon officials suspect the Communists will attempt to control, severing the coun~~te~~ country into two parts, and then establishing a "mobile capital" for a provisional government to rival the American-backed Saigon ~~g~~ government.

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General Don is considered to represent the "new generation of Communist commanders" ~~since~~ none of the Communist generals which fought the Indo-China War II and defeated the French are considered to ~~play~~ act as commanders in the south. However, North Vietnamese Generals, such as General Vo Nguyen Giap, would adopt Mac-Tao-Fung's principles of guerrilla warfare to the ~~the~~ Indo-China campaign, may play ^{strategic} an important directive role via remote-control from Hanoi.

There is scant confirmed information about General Don, but he is believed to be nearly 40 years old. Born in Binh Dinh province, ~~_____~~ miles north of Saigon, Don ^{is} believed to have remained in South Viet Nam after ~~the~~ the 1954 Geneva Accords dividing North and South Viet Nam, and which provided that Communist troops would ~~move~~ move to North Viet Nam. Reliable sources indicate that in 1959, Don, then a captain, moved through the jungle mountain trails to North Viet Nam. During the next two years, he received additional training in ~~Russian~~ North Viet Nam and in Moscow.

In 1961, shortly after the birth of the National Liberation Front and the ~~the~~ "Liberation Army," Don reportedly ~~and~~ left North Viet Nam with two ~~a~~ eleven-man squads and fought his way ~~through~~ through ~~Laos and government-held areas of South Viet Nam~~ back to Binh Dinh province.

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Although still a captain in rank, he was named a leading military and political cadre in charge of Inter-Zone 5, which extends along the populous, rice-growing plains of the South China Sea southward for 300 miles from the 17th parallel.

Viet Cong officers who have served with Don, and since been captured by the government, reportedly consider him "more intelligent and competent than the older generation generals," although this may be an exaggeration of his ability.

Don's headquarters is, according to government commanders, in Do Xa, a jungled mountainous stronghold in Quang Ngai province, just north of Don's native Binh Dinh province. About once a year government forces launch a large-scale operation through the intricately tangled jungles around Do Xa, where they destroy storehouses of food, medicines and administrative buildings, but are seldom able to capture or kill any of the command headquarters staff.

The Viet Cong commanders of the five other inter-zones and two special zones into which the Communists have divided South Viet Nam are relatively unknown or unheard of, but reliable sources indicate that they range in rank from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general (one-star).

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While the Communist offensives in Don's command area have escalated into semi-conventional warfare tactics along a mobile frontline, the Communists themselves do not claim the "Liberation Army" to be a regular, conventional army.

According to a ~~new~~ captured Viet Cong document, the Communists require "five conditions" for the formation of a regular, conventional army. These "five conditions for unification" are:

1. Unification in military ~~hand~~ command. At this time, the Liberation Army has reached the inter-zone level (a combination of a number of provinces), but they do not have a unified ~~military~~ nation-wide military command under a commander-in-chief.
2. Unification in political leadership. At this time, the political backbone for the Communists within South Viet Nam is the Communist Party-directed National Liberation Front for South Viet Nam. But this is still a front, and not a government.
3. Unification in equipment. The capture of a number of the "new family" of weapons, Chinese Communist copies of Soviet weapons, indicate to some military sources that the "Liberation Army" is attempting to standardize its equipment.
4. Unification in organization and adaption to local conditions.
5. Unification in training.

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The Communist calendar in South Viet Nam revolves around two important holidays--December 2 0th, which is the founding of the National Liberation Front, and May 19th, which is the birthday of North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh. Observers in Saigon are carefully watching these two dates this year to see whether the Communists within the South create either an official provisional government or a regular, conventional army.

Some Saigon observers, however, believe the "Liberation Army" will not attempt to create a conventional army--as they did in the final phases of the French Indo-China War--first because militarily they are successful at their present stage of development and second because large concentrations of troops--of a division in strength--would be vulnerable to the superior firepower and airpower of the American-backed government forces.

Reliable sources indicate that since the Communists have neither a commander-in-chief of a regular army nor a provisional government, they are unable to issue an official medal for meritorious ~~services~~ services performed by their troops. This has reportedly caused some grumbling and dissatisfaction among the Viet Cong forces. The "Liberation Army" at this time does have three kinds of commendation, however, a certificate of commendation, a diploma of commendation and a citation. But until they officially launch a conventional army, they have not yet initiated the issuance of ~~many~~ official medals, according to reliable sources.

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Since its official inception in 1960, the "Liberation Army" has had a complex, but very effective four-tiered military structure. The bottom tier, like the lower level of a large wedding cake, comprises the popular forces, which are part-time farmers and part-time fighters. They may be responsible for the production of food; there are no precise estimates of their strength, as it varies from minute to minute throughout the countryside.

Above this layer is the guerrilla force, which operates in platoon strength in the villages. The third level is the regional forces, which operate in at least one company strength in each district throughout the countryside. These two levels are estimated to number more than 100,000 full-time troops. According to reliable sources, some of these troops are leaving their units to return to their families, indicating a drop in morale.

The fourth level is the main force units, which operate in at least one ~~battalion~~ strength in each province and ~~regimental strength~~ at the inter-zone level. American military officials estimate there are about 35,000 regular troops organized into units in this category. Reliable military sources indicate the Communists can amass 3000 troops from all four tiers of this military organization on 48 hours notice. Paralleling this military organization at every level is the political organization of the unarmed cadres and commissars of the National Liberation Front—which revolves

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around the People's Revolutionary Party (Communist).
Saigon observers believe that even if "all the guerrilla
units leave the country, the Communists through Political
subversion can still take over the country without
firing a shot."

Since the 1964, a new and entirely different fifth layer has been added to the "Liberation Army" military structure. This has been the introduction of North Vietnamese-born personnel, many of them operating in fixed, defined units. American military officials ~~make~~ have confirmed that at least 90 per cent of the 4000 confirmed persons who infiltrated from North Vietnam during the first months of 1965 1964 are ~~and~~ were born and raised in North Viet Nam. This is in marked contrast to previous infiltration, which had largely been of persons born and raised in South Viet Nam, but who moved to North Viet Nam in 1954 division of the country, and then again re-infiltrated back to their native provinces during this present ~~Asian~~ conflict. The Northerners, because of the regional differences in t among the Vietnamese, are hence largely considered to be "invaders," instead of "native sons" like General Don.

Officially, both the Saigon government and American officials call these new North Vietnamese ~~g~~ infiltrators as "Viet Cong," a term which ~~had~~ actually means Vietnamese Communist, but which had largely been ~~a~~ used to ~~defe~~ define the Southern-born Communist who moved to North Vietnam and then re-infiltrated back to his native province. American military officials call them "infiltration groups" from North Viet Nam, but are hesitant to call them units of the People's Army of (North) Viet Nam, ~~as~~ commonly called PAVN.

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This quibbling over ~~same~~ semantics is largely overlooked, however, by American advisors working in the Communist-fi Communist-infested areas where these units have infiltrated.

"It's like saying a new bunch of American Army recruits, trained at Fort Fort Riley (Kansas) and equipped by the U. S. government are not ~~new~~ U. S. Army units," one tired American advisor explained. "These are units from North Vietnam, operating as a unit with orthodox infantry tactics, ~~using the best weapons now~~ equipped with the best weapons now used by the current Soviet army."

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It is the introduction of these new PAVN units into the northern provinces of South Viet Nam which have ~~brought~~ escalated internally the war. These units, ~~oper~~ operating in battalion and regimental strength, have been able to employ mobile warfare tactics, in which a mobile frontline position ~~has been maintained~~ of six miles in length have been ~~held~~ for days--but this is not a fixed frontline position which characterizes conventional warfare.

These units have been equipped with mortars, plus .75 mm. recoilless rifles, Chinese Communist copies of Soviet designs.

"So far, these North Vietnamese have used their .75 mm. rifles in direct fire ~~lin~~ like an ordinary weapon," one American advisor in the northern provinces ~~has~~ explained.

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"Their next step will be to use it as pack artillery, ~~empty~~ employing it in indirect fire," the ~~adviser~~ ~~gave~~ groaned. "This will give them a range of four miles that they can attack from."

In the ~~start~~ some of the mountain areas, Viet Cong troops have been stopping government-controlled gasoline trucks, indicating to some reliable sources that these new units have their own trucks and are transporting ~~themselves~~ their troops by truck, ~~rather than using trucks~~ within South Viet Nam.

Not long ago, a South Vietnamese general was talking with an American general at a cocktail party at the government's High Command.

The South Vietnamese general recalled when he was a division commander in the area which encompasses Inter-Zone 5, lead by General Dong of the "Liberation Army."

"I was then a colonel," the South Vietnamese general explained, "and my Viet Cong counterpart was a lieutenant colonel. He was very good and very lucky. He did not have to worry about sending his children to school; he did not have to take his wife to the movies; he did not have to go to cocktail parties. He had only a map and ~~spent~~ spent all his time making war against me and my troops."

The American general was embarrassed and said nothing. The South Vietnamese general absentmindedly took another sip of his gin and tonic.