

An Incomparable Opportunity to Win the Vietnam War in 1970

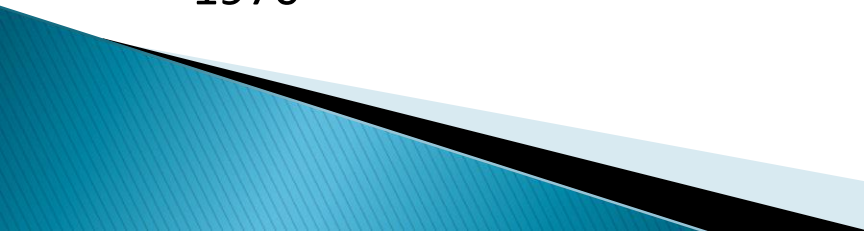
**(Answering the Book 1 Question: Could the
Vietnam War Have Been Won?)**

**Dr. Daniel P. Schrage, Colonel USAR Ret; SES Level 3 Civil Service Ret;
Professor Emeritus Georgia Tech Ret**

**Modified VHPA 39th Reunion Presentation, from May 26,
2022**

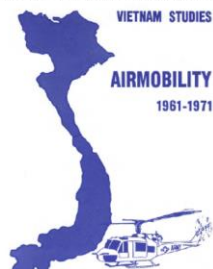
Copyright Daniel P. Schrage

Rationale for this Presentation

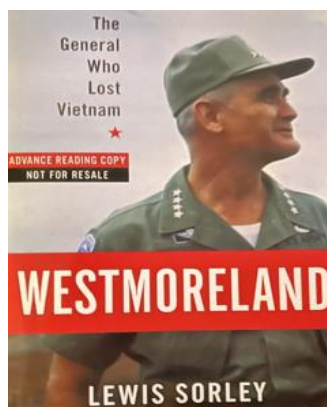
- ▶ While writing a first book in a trilogy of my three careers I reviewed my experiences in the Vietnam War in 1970-71 and compared them with accounts and experiences documented in other references, i.e. books, studies, foreign policy and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) documents, along with the recent Fox Nation videos on “The Vietnam War.”
 - ▶ While some speculation has it that the Vietnam War was winnable, no one has documented how and when it could have been won.
 - ▶ Also, those writing or judging the outcome never actually experienced or clearly understood all the key elements that would cause the War to be won or lost in the 1970 Cambodia Incursion
 - ▶ This presentation documents actual experiences and compares them with conclusions from other parties.
 - ▶ Its objective is to draw the conclusion that those actually participating in fighting the Vietnam War did their best to win the war and could have in 1970
- 

Some Key Numbered References to Explain the Vietnam War

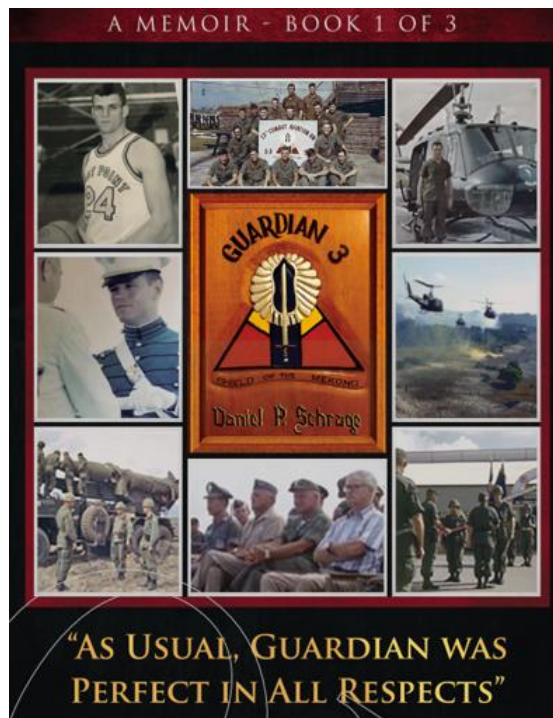
AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971
By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY WASHINGTON, D.C., 1971



1. Explains Air Mobility Success in Vietnam War



3. Search & Destroy Functions With Enemy KIAs as Metric Mainly Used w/ U.S. Forces 1965-1968



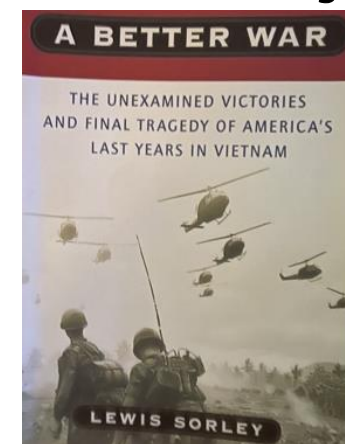
5. Conclusion: Gens Westmoreland & Abrams didn't Actually lose the Vietnam War; Defense Secretary Melvin Laird did by not funding Army and then accelerating Troop Reduction in 1970-71

FOREIGN
RELATIONS
OF THE
UNITED
STATES

1969-1976
VOLUME VII

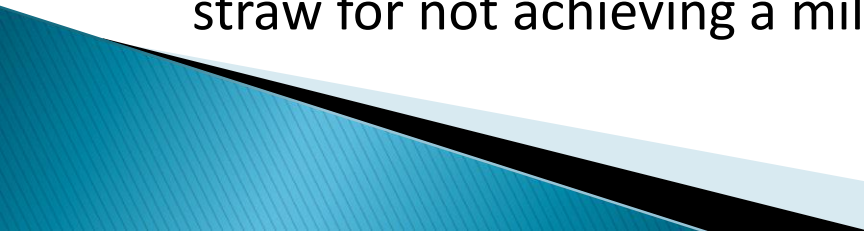
VIETNAM
JULY 1970-
JANUARY 1972

2. Documents Poor Decision Making



4. Clear, Hold & Secure Functions for Pacification, Vietnamization 1968-1972

Presentation Outline

- ▶ Dr. Schrage's background and Credentials
 - ▶ CPT Dan Schrage's Experiences in Vietnam War and Cambodia Incursion
 - ▶ The Vietnam War following the 1968 Tet Offensive
 - ▶ The 164th Combat Aviation Group (CAG) leadership & partnership with the ARVN Divisions in the Mekong Delta
 - ▶ The Pacification and Vietnamization Programs for A Better War
 - ▶ The Overthrow of Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk in March 1970 by General Lon Nol for Democracy not properly supported
 - ▶ The Cambodia Incursion by South Vietnam ARVN and US forces in Spring 1970 need to be extended during Summer 1970
 - ▶ The Missed Opportunity to Win the Vietnam War in Summer 1970 was not taken President Nixon and GEN Abrams
 - ▶ The Transfer of the Soc Trang Army Air Field to the VNAF and USAF and the draw down of Army Aviation in South Vietnam was the final straw for not achieving a military victory
- 

Dr. Schrage's Background and Credentials

Academic Credentials:

- B.S. General Engineering, 1967, USMA, West Point, NY
- M.S. Aerospace Engineering, 1974, Georgia Institute of Technology
- M.A. Business Administration, 1975, Webster U. (St. Louis, MO)
- D.Sc., Mechanical Engineering., 1978, Washington U. (St. Louis, MO)

Army and Operational Aviation Credentials:

- Honest John Missile Battery Commander, 1/34th Arty, 24 Inf Div, REFORGER 1, Germany 1968-9
- Army Aviation School, Rotary Wing Aviator, 1969
- 1st Aviation Brigade, 164th CAG, 13th Cbt Avn Bn, 162nd Assault Helicopter Company, Airmobile Commander, Lift Ship & Gunship Platoon Leaders, CanTho, Mekong Delta, RVN and Cambodia, 1970
- Asst S-3 and S-3 Operations Officer, 13th Cbt Avn, BN, Soc Trang, Can Tho, RVN and Cambodia, 1970-71; orchestrated transfer of Soc Trang Army Air Field (AAF) to VNAF & USAF, Fall 1970

Technical and Academic Credentials

- Aviation Systems Command (AVSCOM) & AVRADCOM, St. Louis, MO, 1974-1978
 - Vibration & Dynamics Engineer, AH-1S IMRB, AAH (Apache) and UTTAS(Black Hawk) SSEBs
- Assoc Tech Director, S&T; Director for Advanced Systems, AVRADCOM, St. Louis, MO, 1978-1984
 - Chief, Structures and Aeromechanics Division, Tech Chair AHIP SSEB (OH-58D), Director, LHX Concept Formulation (RAH-66 Comanche), Acting Chief Scientist Combined Arms Center (CAC) (6 months, 1983)
- Professor and Director, Georgia Tech Rotorcraft Center of Excellence (RCOE), Georgia Tech, 1984 – 2019 which is now called Vertical Lift Research Center of Excellence (VLRCOE)
- Author of Book: “As Usual, Guardian was Perfect in All Respects”, Website: www.danielschrage.com

CPT Dan Schrage's Experiences in Vietnam War and 1970 Cambodia Incursion

- ▶ Arrived in South Vietnam in January 1970 and was assigned to the 164th Combat Aviation Group (CAG), the 13th Combat Aviation Battalion (CAB) and then to the 162nd Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) at the Can Tho Army Air Field (AAF) in the Mekong Delta
- ▶ Served as a helicopter lift ship platoon leader, as an air mission commander, and briefly as the gunship platoon leader for the 162nd AHC from Jan-June 1970
- ▶ Participated in the Cambodia Incursion as a flight lead in the largest air assault of the 9th ARVN Division; supported US Embassy with helicopter reconnaissance out of Phnom Penh Airport, before and after Cambodia Incursion; provided Government of Cambodia Army FANK with gunship support to keep open Highway 4 in Elephant Mountains in 1970
- ▶ Assigned as the Assistant S-3 and then S-3 Operations Officer for the 13th CAB at Soc Trang AAF and then Can Tho AAF from July 1970-January 1971.
- ▶ Orchestrated the 13th CAB Transfer of Soc Trang Army Air Field (AAF) to the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) and their USAF Advisers in November 1970

Roadmap for Key Participants, Landscapes, and Locations in the Mekong Delta



Black: cities, villages, and U.S. Army Corps (CTZs),

Blue: U.S. Forces, i.e., 13th CAB, 307th CAB, 214th CAB, 164th CAG, Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs & Riverine Force, and U.S. advisors to Ruff/Puffs;

Purple: South Vietnam Military Locations: i.e., ARVN Divisions, 7th, 9th, and 21st, South Vietnam (SV) Prisoners of War (POW) ;Prison on Phu Quoc Island.

Red: Viet Cong (VC) and PAVN organization terrain hideouts and organization areas, i.e., mangrove swamps, e.g., U Minh Forest, River Deltas, Plain of Reeds, and Seven Sister Mountain Region.

Green: Mostly rice paddies producing rice as the “breadbasket” for Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

Three key ARVN Divisions in the Mekong Delta were supported by the 164th Combat Aviation Group

- Besides the unique geographic features, the big difference in 1970 between the operations in the IV Corps Tactical Zone and the other areas of Vietnam was the lack of any long-term division-size U.S. troop commitment. **Therefore, Vietnamization of ground forces was already in effect.**
- The 164th Group was not precisely controlled by the 1st Aviation Brigade. Its commander could move assets: organize task forces, etc. They had a combat organization that permitted a diversity of aviation assets to support three ARVN Divisions, the 7th, 9th and 21st" and the Regional and Popular Forces, called "Ruff/Puffs."



7th Infantry Division



9th Infantry Division



21st Infantry Division



- This made the aviation group commander in the Delta, in a critical sense, **the "airmobile commander."** The rapport between ARVN Divisions and 164th CAG was outstanding and have been extended into Cambodia

“The Real Story of the 1st Aviation Brigade is in the 164th Combat Aviation Group in the Delta was Its Leaders”

(Vietnam Studies: Air mobility, 1961–1971, Dept of Army)

- ▶ Brigadier General George W. Putnam, Jr., who took command of the 1st Aviation Brigade on 6 January 1970 from Major General Allen M. Burdett, Jr., remarked, “elsewhere it was, ‘give so many helicopters here; and so many there.’ Therefore **the CG, 1st Aviation Brigade, exercised very little control over the assets of the Brigade in the I, II, and III Corps.** However IV Corps was different
- ▶ In December 1969, **Colonel William J. Maddox, Jr.,** was assigned as **Commanding Officer of the 164th Aviation Group** after commanding 3d Brigade of the U.S. 25th Infantry Division. He served as Commanding Officer of the 164th Aviation Group in South Vietnam from December 1969 to July 1970 and should have served longer **It was a good choice since Colonel Maddox had extensive experience in the Delta.**
- ▶ First, he was **Commanding Officer of the 13th CAB** from July 1965 to August 1966. Second, **he was Senior Advisor to the 21st ARVN Infantry Division** in the Mekong Delta from September 1966-Jun 67



CPT Schrage in 162nd Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) The Vulture 16 (Lift Ships) and Copperhead 36 (Gunships) in CanTho Army Air Field from January to July 1970



164th CAG Cambodia Operations

(29 April - 19 May 1970)

► **Mission**

Provide aviation support as directed to US, ARVN and other Free World Military Alliance Forces for the conduct of combat and logistical counter-insurgency operations in Cambodia, while continuing to support this extension of pacification and essential combat task throughout the IV Corp Tactical Zone

► **Concept of Operation**

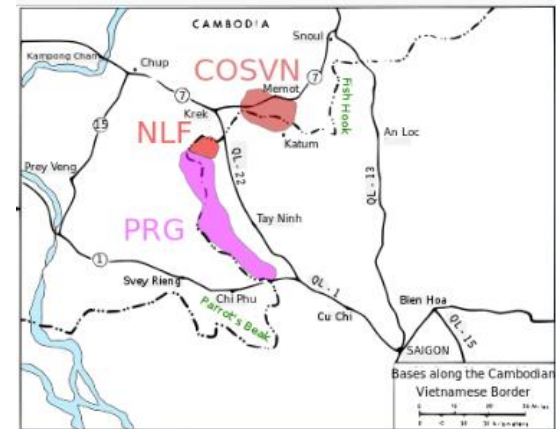
164th CAG supported the 7th, 9th, 21st and 44th STZ, operations with Task Forces Blackhawk, Cougar, Guardian and forces in search and destroy operations in Cambodia. Seeking elimination of VC/NVA forces storage sights and sanctuaries

► **Execution**

During the period 29 April-19 May 1970, the 164th Aviation Group (Combat) supported the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and other Government forces of the IV Corps Tactical Zone in operations in Cambodia.

Planning for Attacking the Cambodian Base Areas

- In mid-April 1970 General Abrams and Chief of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) General Cao Văn Viên discussed the possibility of attacking the Cambodian base areas. Cao passed on these discussions to South Vietnamese President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu who verbally ordered the JGS to instruct ARVN III Corps to liaise with MACV for operations in Cambodia.
- In late April Thiệu sent a secret directive instructing the JGS to conduct operations in Cambodia to a depth of 40–60 km (25–37 mi) from the border.
- By April 1970, the PAVN/Khmer Rouge offensive in Cambodia was going well and they had taken all five of Cambodia's northeastern provinces and Kissinger predicted to Nixon that the Lon Nol regime would not survive 1970 on its own.
- In response to events in Cambodia, President Nixon believed that there were distinct possibilities for a U.S. response.



Map showing the headquarters complexes along the Vietnamese Cambodian border

- With Sihanouk gone, conditions were ripe for strong measures against the base areas.
- Nixon was also adamant that some action be taken to support "The only government in Cambodia in the last twenty-five years that had the guts to take a pro-Western stand"
- As the poorly-trained FANK went from defeat after defeat, Nixon was afraid that Cambodia would "go down the drain" if he did not take action.

General Lon Nol's Attempt to Make Cambodia a Democracy in 1970 but Lacked Timely Necessary US Support

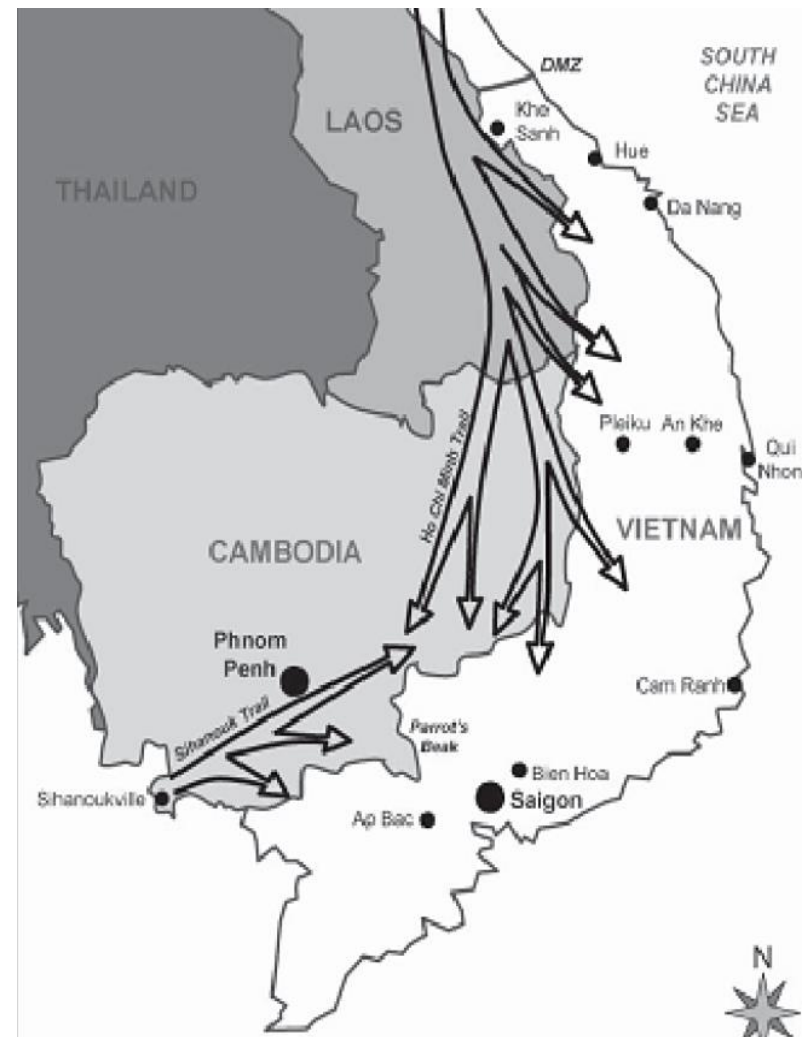
- Lon Nol was a prime architect of the coup in March 1970 that overthrew Sihanouk, and he became the most prominent leader in the new government, serving as its premier until 1972.
- Abandoning Sihanouk's policy of neutrality in the Indochina war, Lon Nol established close ties with the United States and South Vietnam, permitting their forces to operate on Cambodian territory.
- **In June 1970 General Lon Nol sent a letter to President Nixon seeking US Support, including armored cars and helicopters.**



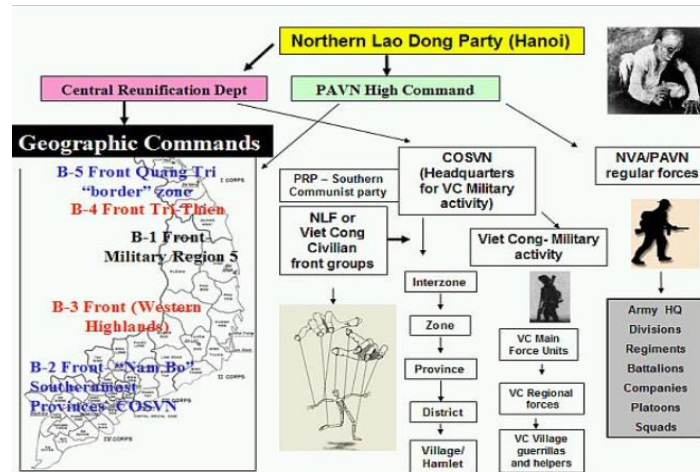
On July 23, Nixon issued Presidential Determination 71-2, which reallocated approximately \$40 million of Military Assistance Program (MAP) funds for Fiscal Year 1971 from other countries to Cambodia. The Washington Senior Advisory Group (WSAG) agreed that the armored cars and helicopters which Lon Nol requested in his letter to the President should not be approved. Mr. Green is to draft a reply to Lon Nol emphasizing other forms of U.S. support for Cambodia and skirting the question of armored cars and helicopters.

Ho Chi Minh and Sihanoukville Trails

- Following Lon Nol's overthrow of the Prince Sihanouk Regime in March 1970 he shut down Sihanoukville and the Sihanouk Trail which greatly impacted the NVA and VC plan for a major Spring Offensive in the Mekong Delta to possibly win the War
- This was followed by the ARVN and US Forces thrust in the Cambodia Incursion in Spring 1970
- However, the Incursion was only for a short time and the PAVN and VC and their Headquarters fled to Northern Cambodia
- It will be shown later that GEN Abrams called this fleeing as a "Incomparable Opportunity"; however, it was never exploited



The Cambodia Incursion and the Lon Nol Overthrow Cancelled the NVA Strategy for Winning the War in 1970 in the Mekong Delta



- Following the Vietnam War, **information on the importance of the Mekong Delta to the enemy** was in a quote obtained from the NVA/PAVN Central Office for South Vietnam's Resolution No. 9 disseminated in 1969.
- It ***emphasized the strategic importance of the Mekong Delta***, summarized in Figure above.
- The NVA/PAVN leadership conceived Mekong Delta as ***the principal battlefield where the outcome of the war in South Vietnam would be decided***.
- Therefore, the PAVN/VC infiltrated the **1st Division Headquarters and its three regiments, the 88th, 101D, and 95A**, into IV Corps, where they were defeated or moved to U Minh Forest & Cambodia during Incursion

Decisions by President Nixon Administration

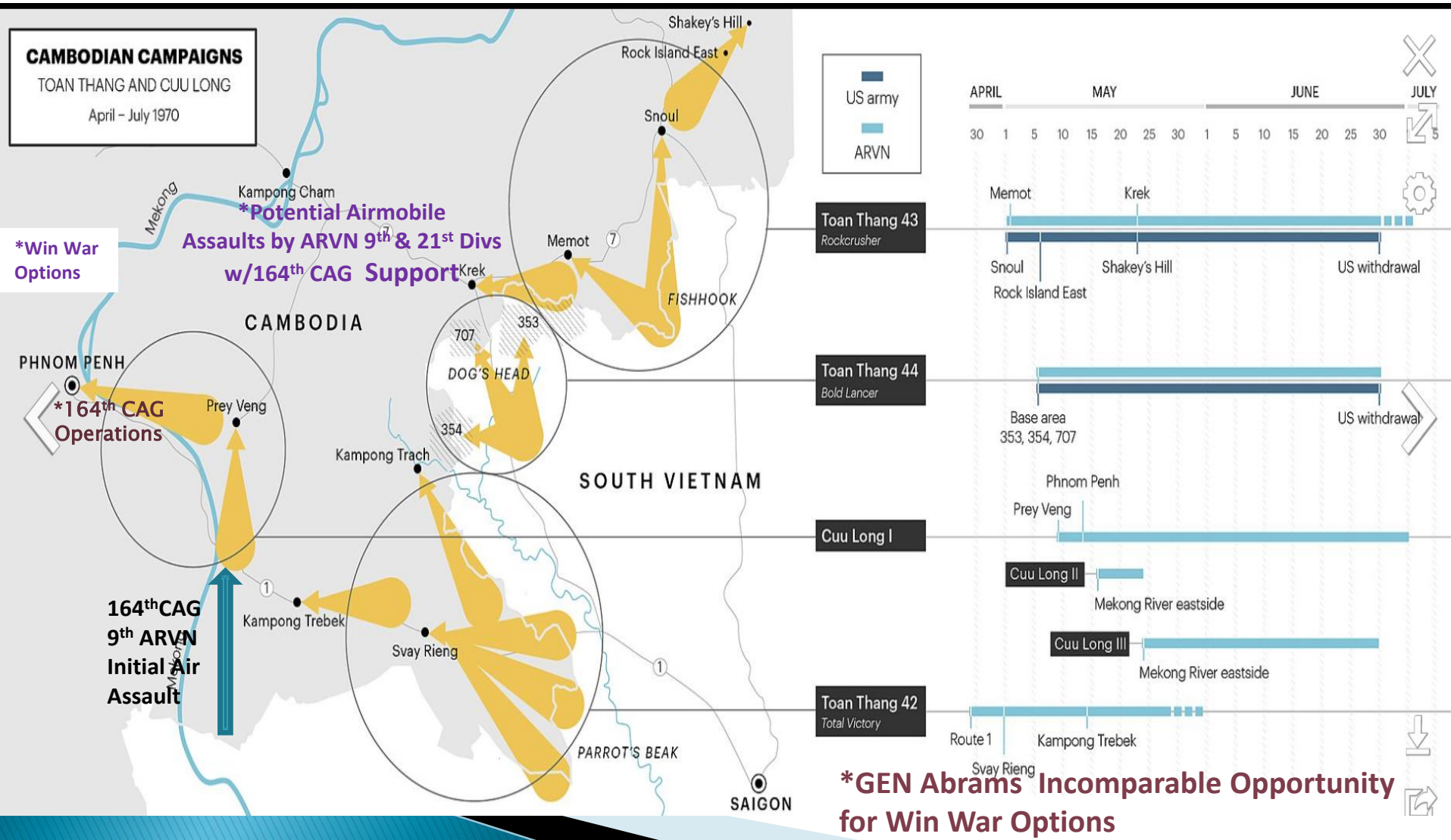
(Not all of the members of the administration agreed that an invasion of Cambodia was either militarily or politically expedient)

- **Secretaries Laird and Rogers were both opposed to any such operation** due to their belief that it would engender intense domestic opposition in the U.S. and that it might possibly derail the ongoing peace negotiations in Paris.
- Both were castigated by Henry Kissinger for their "bureaucratic foot-dragging."
- As a result, **Laird was bypassed by the Joint Chiefs in advising the White House on planning and preparations for the Cambodian operation.**
- Once Laird learned that Nixon was determined "to do something", **he suggested only invading the "Parrot's Beak" area with ARVN forces.**
- Nixon in his 1978 memoirs wrote this recommendation was **"the most pusillanimous little nitpicker I ever saw"**. Nixon had decided to go for "the big play" for "all the marbles" since he anticipated "a hell of an uproar at home" regardless of what he did.
- **Laird would later jeopardize any 1970 chance of Winning the Vietnam War by expediting troop withdrawals, including 164th CAG aviation elements, and with holding Army funding in 1970-71**

Cambodia Incursion: Thirteen major operations with Arrows

Identification of Objectives in Spring and Early Summer 1970

(ARVN Forces: 29 April and 22 July, US Forces: 1 May and 30 Jun 1970)

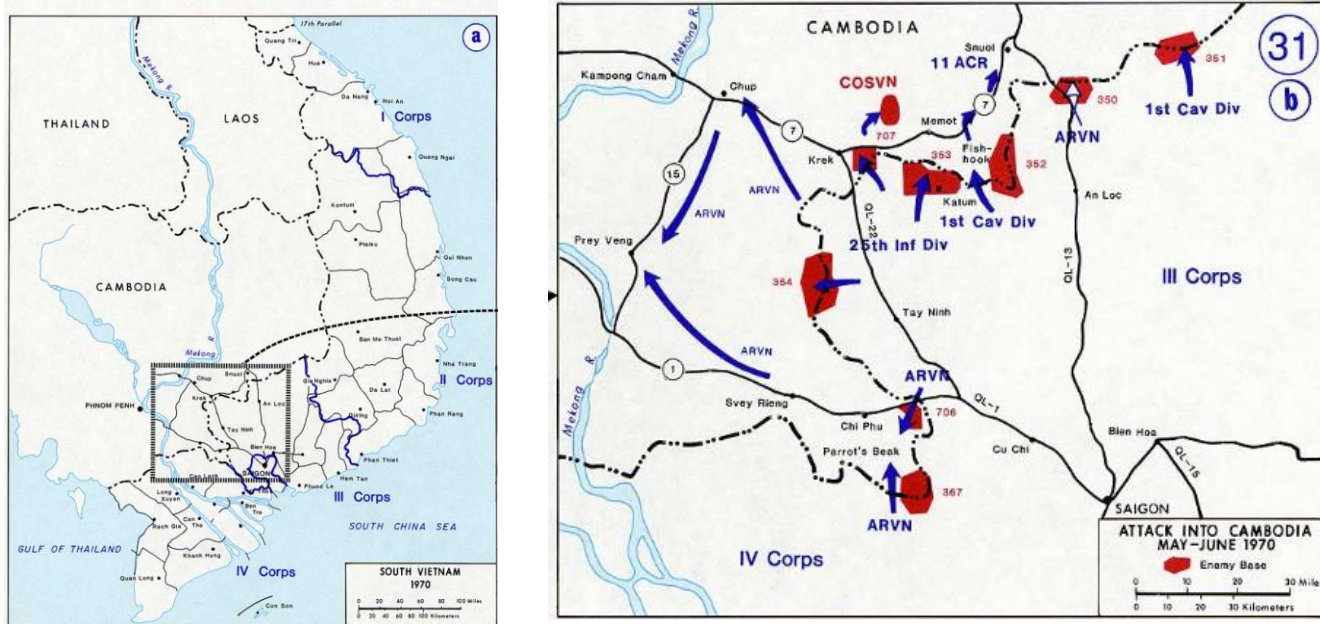


CUU LONG I began with an air assault of the 9th ARVN Division along the Mekong by aircraft of the U.S. 164th Aviation Group - The largest Air Armada ever assembled in IV Corps

- **D-Day was 9 May 1970, and operation Cou Long I commenced with four pronged assault into Cambodia.**
- **Two armored columns and a navel column crossed the border and hastened to link up with the airmobile assault force.**
- **Helicopter transport of the 164th Group inserted 9th ARVN Division for a total of 2425 troops into nine landing zones in the vicinity of the Ferry Site crossing of Highway 1**

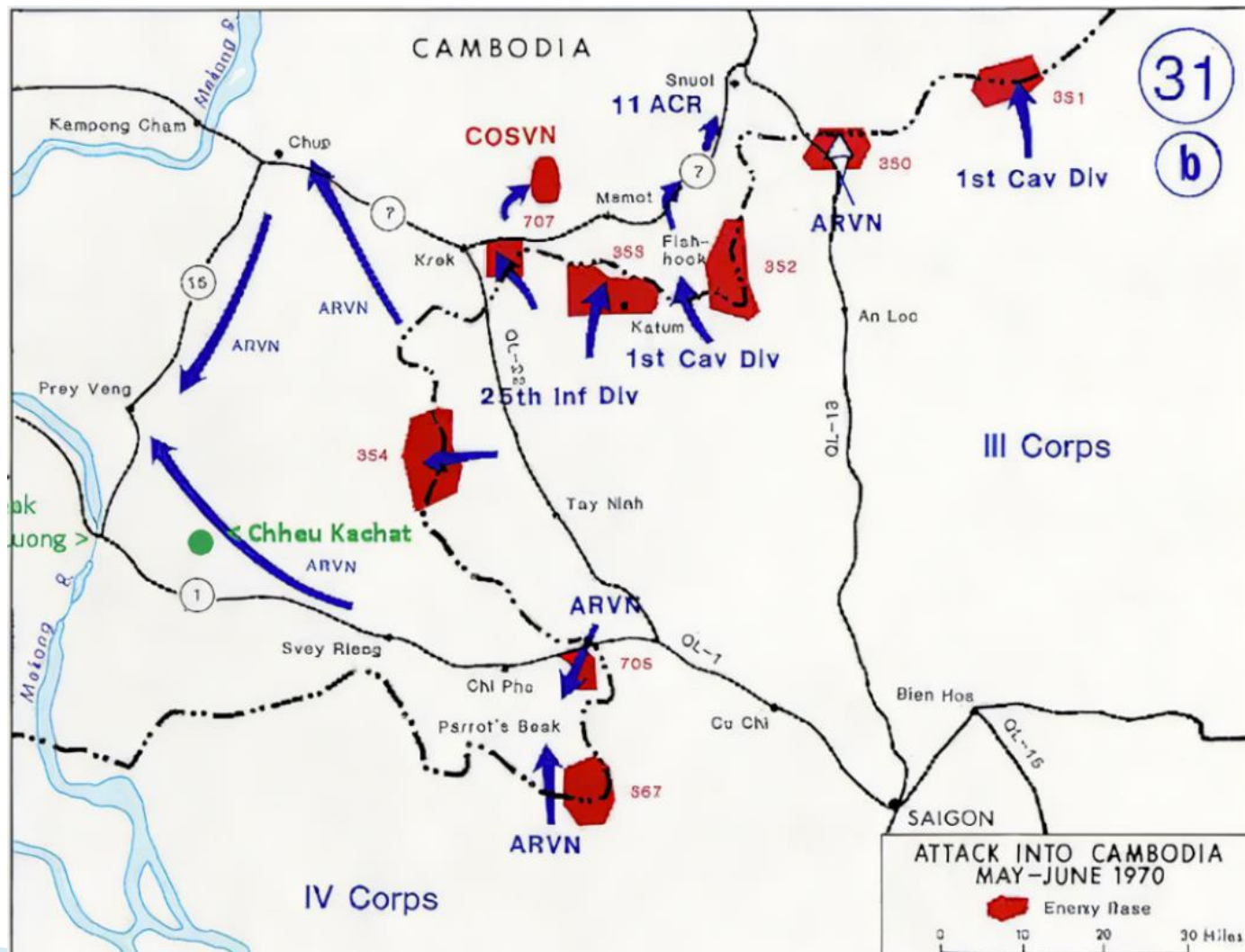


Operations: The location of the campaign in Parrot's Beak(IV Corps) and Fish Hook Area (III Corps)-Wikipedia



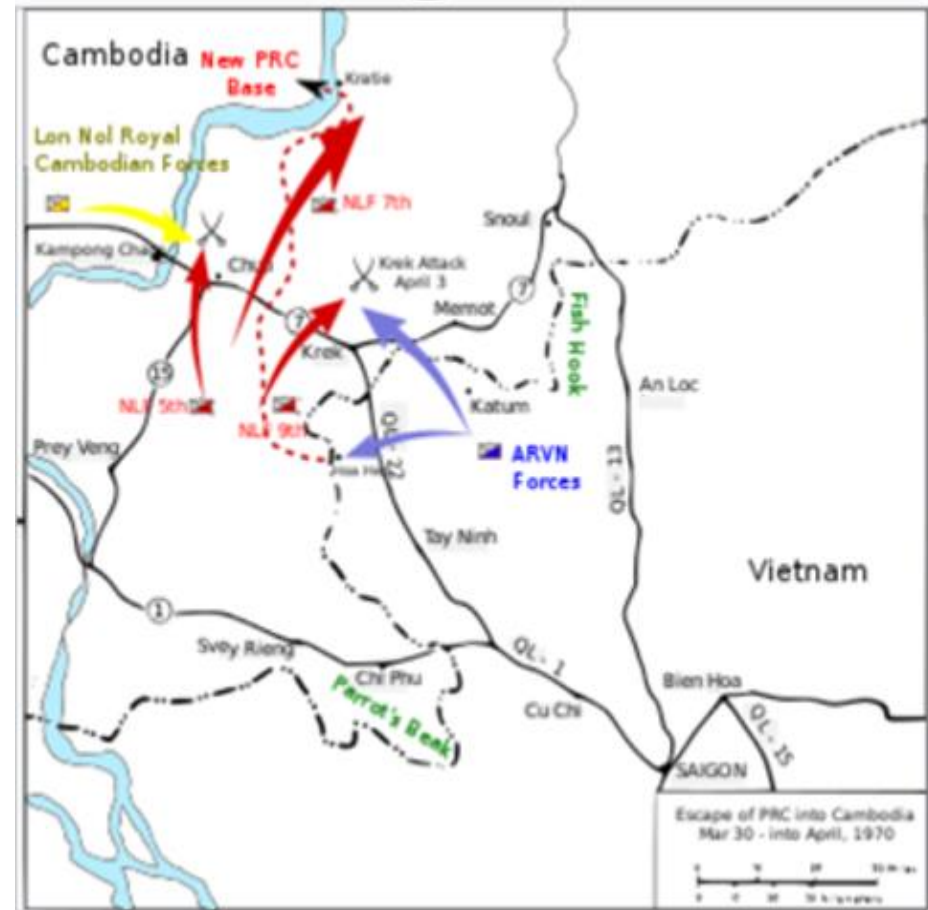
- The objective of the campaign was the defeat of the approximately 40,000 troops of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), capture their COSVN HQs and the Viet Cong (VC) and their NLF and PRG HQs in the eastern border regions of Cambodia.
- Cambodian neutrality and military weakness made its territory a safe zone where PAVN/VC forces could establish bases for operations over the border.
- With the US shifting toward a policy of Vietnamization and withdrawal, it sought to shore up the South Vietnamese government by eliminating the cross-border threat

Expanded Operations in Parrot's Peak and Fish Hook Areas with COSVN HQs Identified

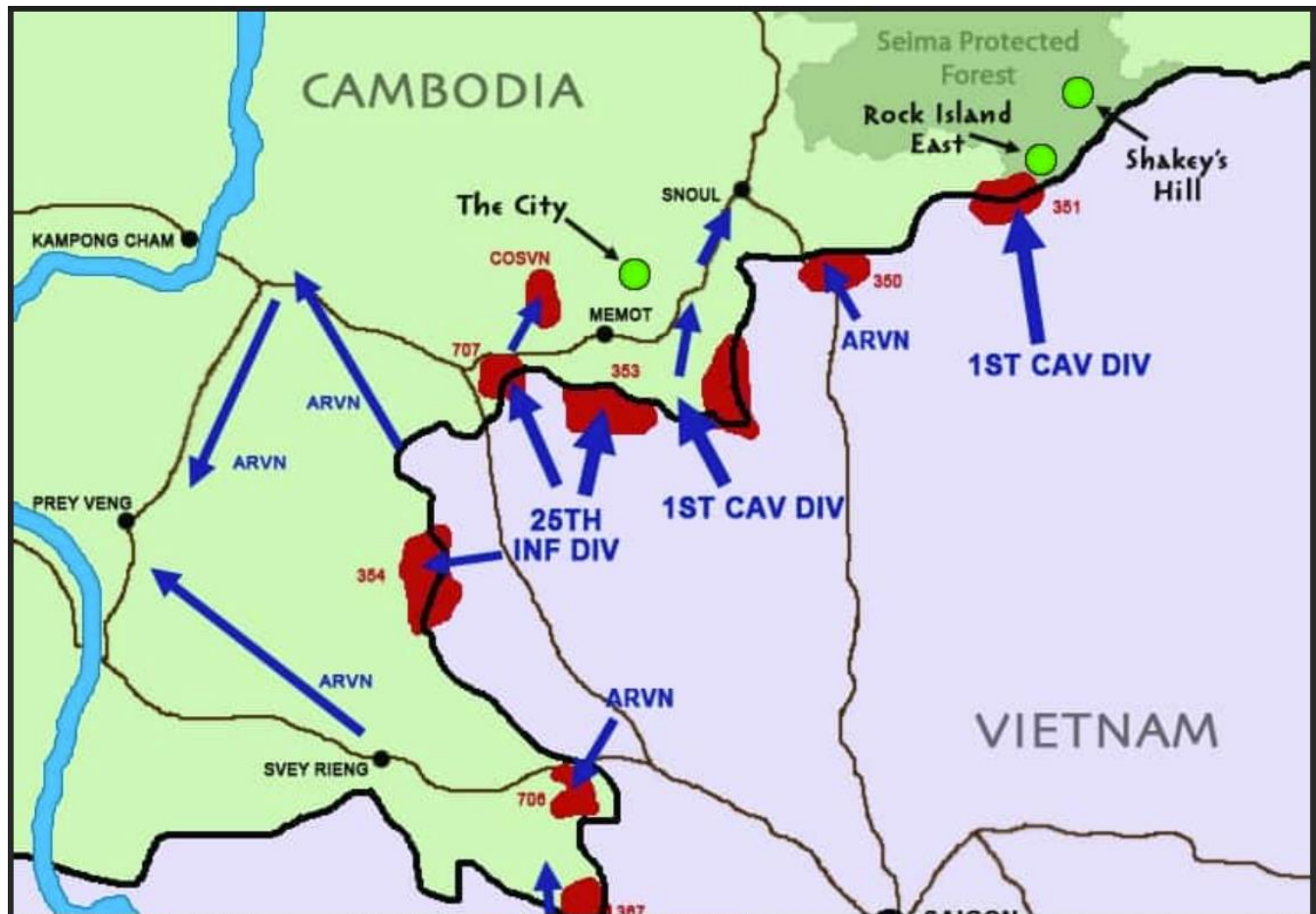


Escape of the NVA Provisional Revolutionary Government to Northern Cambodia (Wikipedia)

- Planning for any eventuality the NVA started planning emergency Evacuation routes in the event of a coordinated assault by Cambodians from the west and South Vietnamese From the east.
- After the Cambodian coup, COSVN was evacuated on 19 March 1970.
- While the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG) and PAVN/VC bases were preparing to move to the north and safety they came under aerial bombardment from B-52 bombers on 27 March 1970.



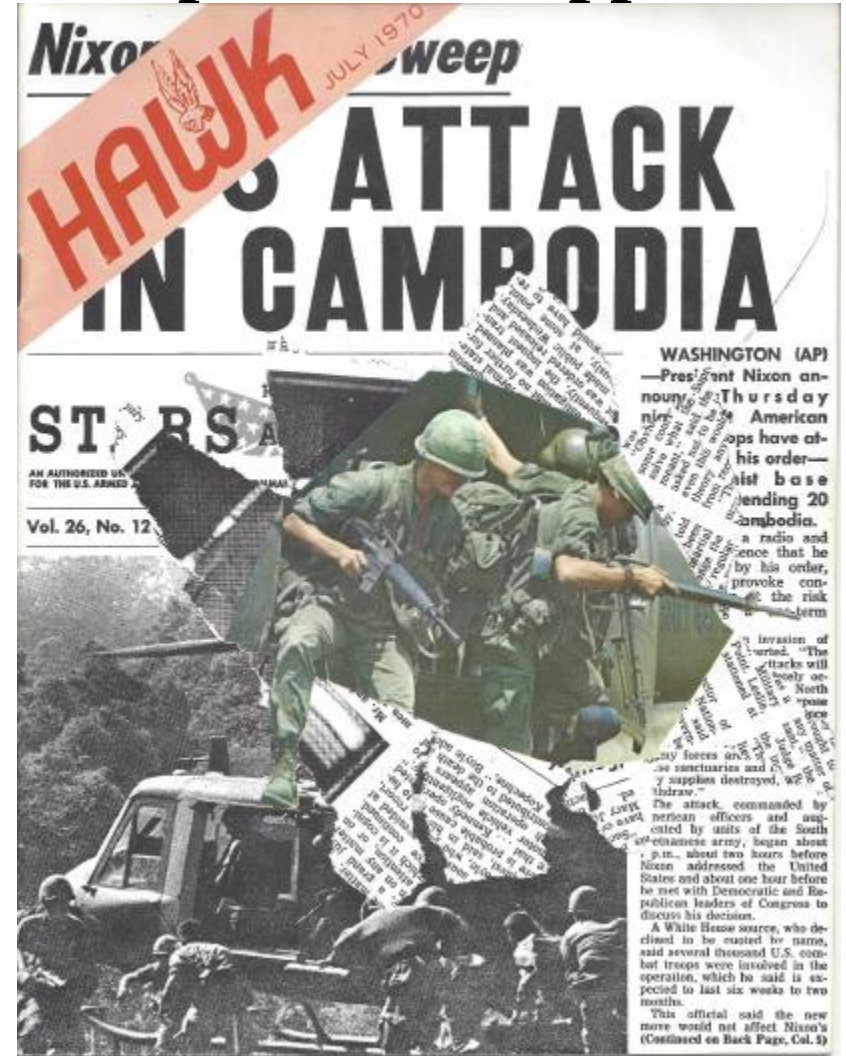
The Cambodia Incursion included Finding Numerous Huge Ammo and Supply Dumps such as “The City”, “Rock Island East” and “Shakey’s Hill”; however, many of the PAVN and VC Troops Fled



The 164th CAG Supported the Attack in Cambodia and Uncovered huge Caches of Weapons and Supplies



A Big Catch in the Fish Hook



Cambodia Campaign Major Objective Not Achieved

- ▶ *A Major Objective of the Campaign was the defeat of the approximately 40,000 troops of the PAVN and the VC in the eastern border regions of Cambodia.*
- ▶ **Cambodian neutrality and military weakness had made this territory a safe zone where PAVN/VC forces could establish bases for operations over the border.**
- ▶ **With the US shifting toward a policy of Vietnamization and withdrawal, it sought to shore up the South Vietnamese government by eliminating the cross-border threat from Cambodia and Laos**
- ▶ *With General Lon Nol overthrowing the Prince Sihanouk Regime an opportunity for a coalition between Cambodia, South Vietnam and USA Forces was a possibility to win the Vietnam War*

To a Surprising Degree the Incursion was Unopposed

(Sorley, Lewis, "Cambodia Chapter, A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam, 1999)

- ▶ When facing enemy forces, read a typewritten directive issued by the NVA B-3 Front Headquarters on 17 March 1970 and captured a week into the incursion, Communist forces in Cambodia **"should attempt to break away and avoid shooting back. Our purpose is to conserve forces as much as we can"**.
- ▶ General George Brown, 7th Air Force Commander at MACV, exulted that the enemy had **"a hell of a problem"**
- ▶ General Abrams response was "Well, that's right , George, but, you see, he's used to a hell of a problem. I get a certain amount of enjoyment. I must say, out of seeing the problem get complicated. But it isn't worth much. He's a pretty determined chap, when you get right down to it"

General Abrams' Missed an Incomparable Opportunity for Achieving a Winning War

(Sorley, Lewis, "Cambodia Chapter, A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam, 1999. plus Wikipedia)

- ▶ Given that respect for the enemy, and his understanding that ***an incomparable opportunity was at hand***, the constraints on the operation in terms of time and depth were agonizing to General Abrams as a soldier
- ▶ "What we need right now is another division –go in deep," he said in the wake of the initial penetrations. (Sounds like potential airmobile assaults in Slide 10?)
- ▶ "***We need to go west from where we are, we need to go north and east from where we are. And we need to do it now. It's moving and –goddamn, goddamn***"
- ▶ This last was said wistfully, with great sorrow and regret. Someone asked: "Time to exploit." Abrams: "Christ – it's so clear. Don't let them pick up the pieces. Don't let them," said very softly, "pick up the pieces. Just like the Germans –you give them thirty-six hours and, goddamn it, you've got to start the war all over again."
- ▶ There were two divisions available in the Mekong Delta and Cambodia, The 21st ARVN Division, the best ARVN Division in Vietnam supported by the 13th CAB had participated in Cuu Long I and returned to the Mekong Delta. The 9th ARVN Division was still in Cambodia. With the 164th CAG available airmobile support they could have pursued and defeated the PAVN/VC in Cambodia.
 - ▶ The opportunity was there to win the War.

Execution of this Incomparable Opportunity Required Immediate Actions by General Abrams

- ▶ General Abrams as the CG of the Vietnam War needed to provide leadership & immediate action with President Nixon's quick approval to *Lead, Win the War and make Vietnamization a success*
- ▶ While he led President Nixon's Vietnamization and Pacification Program based on *Clear, Hold and Secure* functions, it was now time to follow *General Westmoreland's Search and Destroy* functions to capture and defeat the PAVN/Khmer Rouge Headquarters and Forces Moving to Northern Cambodia
- ▶ He needed to rapidly explore their weakened state as a result of the Lon Nol's Overthrow, e.g. the shut down of Sihanoukville and its Trail and expulsion of NVA/VC from Cambodia
- ▶ He needed to use the air mobility and gunships provided by the 164th CAG in support of the 21st and 9th ARVN divisions to defeat and capture the VNA Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG)

Communists were badly hurt in Cambodia Incursion, the Chinese will play an increasingly important political role in Communist operations in Cambodia

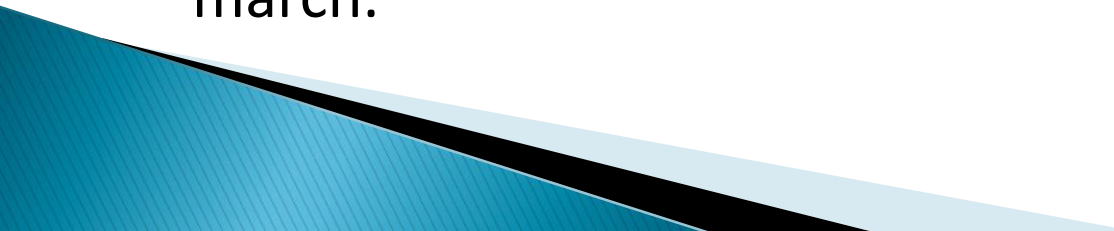
(Report From General Walters on Communist Attitudes Regarding Cambodia and Vietnam)

- ▶ Their base and logistics complex was overturned. Coordination has been seriously hindered.
- ▶ It was “the toughest setback in twenty years.”
- ▶ There was a net loss of 60 percent of all equipment, about 70 percent of ammunition. Fortunately for them the U.S. and the ARVN did not locate all caches.
- ▶ 80 percent of medical supplies were lost, and some 5,000 North Vietnamese wounded died for lack of medical care.
- ▶ Soldiers were ordered to try to save two individual weapons rather than crew-served weapons.
- ▶ It will take six months to refill depots, and regiments of porters and bearers have been organized.
- ▶ It was a considerable shock for the North Vietnamese to be attacked where they felt safe.
- ▶ Cambodia, once a friendly country, is now hostile for the NVA
- ▶ The loss of border bases made it difficult to supply Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam.

Escape of the VNA Provisional Revolutionary Government to Northern Cambodia (Wikipedia)

- ▶ Moving across the border in Cambodia on 30 March 1970, elements of the *PRG and VC were surrounded in their bunkers by ARVN forces flown in by helicopter.*
- ▶ Surrounded, they waited until nightfall and then with security provided by the NVA 7th Division they **broke out of the encirclement and fled north** to unite with the COSVN in Kratie Province in what would come to be known as the "*Escape of the Provisional Revolutionary Government*"
- ▶ Trương Như Tảng, then Minister of Justice in the PRG, recounts that the march to the northern bases **was a succession of forced marches**, broken up by B-52 bombing raids.

Escape of the VNA Provisional Revolutionary Government to Northern Cambodia (Wikipedia)

- ▶ Years later Trương would recall just how "Close [South Vietnamese] were to annihilating or capturing the core of the Southern resistance – elite units of our frontline fighters along with the civilian and much of the military leadership".
 - ▶ After many days of hard marches the PRG reached the northern bases, and relative safety, in the Kratie region.
 - ▶ Casualties were light and the march even saw the birth of a baby to Dương Quỳnh Hoa, the deputy minister of health in the PRG.
 - ▶ The column needed many days to recover and Trương himself would require weeks to recover from the long march.
- 

Other Operations in Cambodia by CPT Schrage, 1970

May 1970

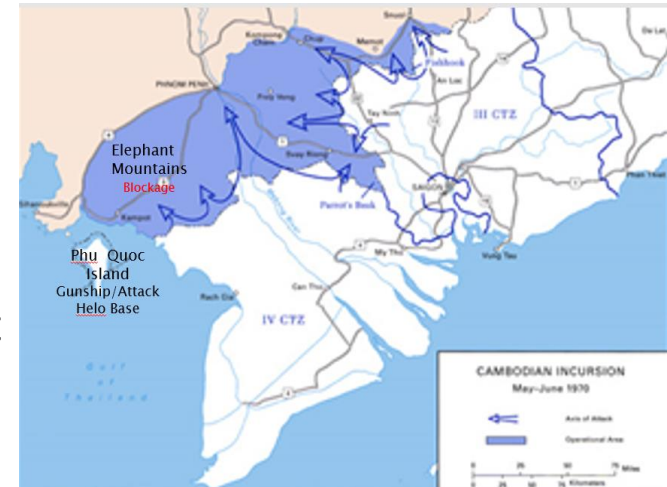
- CPT Schrage supported US Embassy Operations in Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- As he approached the Phnom Penh Airport he saw a DC3 Aircraft damaged on the runway.
- No radio contact was made with the tower as a mortar attack on the airport had resulted in holes in the hangars and damage to the few GOC helicopters.
- Support for the US Embassy was risky In trying to find out who controlled what areas



Phnom Penh Airport

June 1970

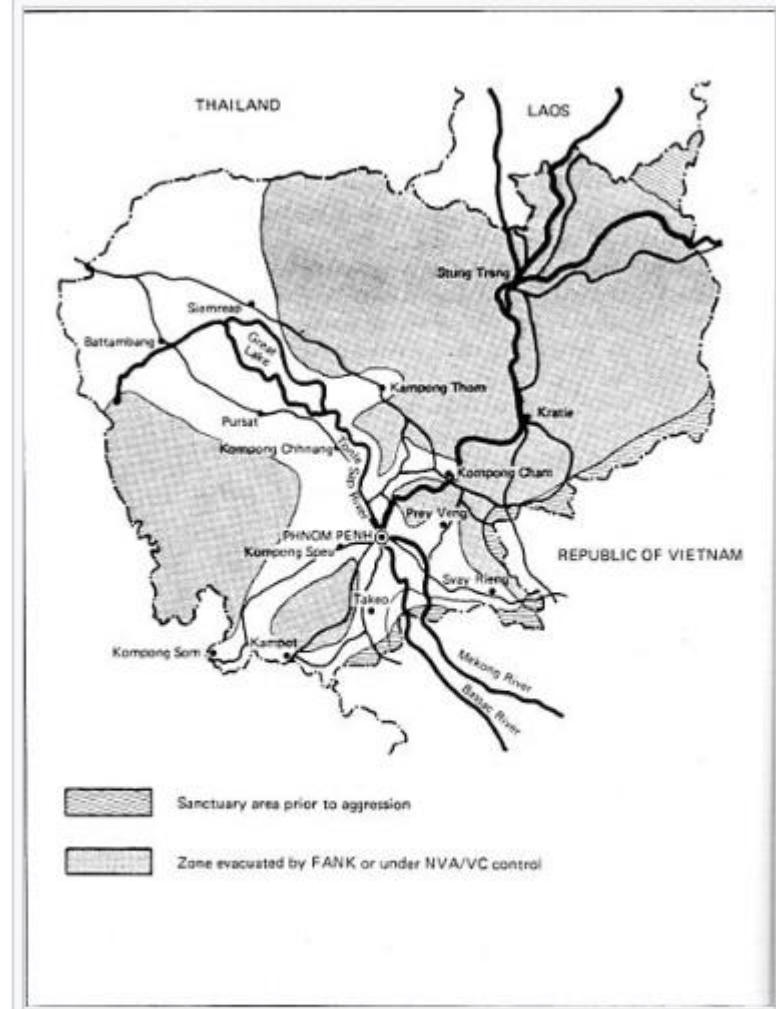
- NVA/VC/Khmer Rouge began to block traffic on Highway 4 from Phnom Penh through the Elephant Mountains to the Coast
- CPT Schrage provided Command & Control support for Helicopter gunships off of Phu Quoc, Island.
- He had to land in the Elephants Mtns to coordinate with GoC FANK Commanders for identifying targets for gunships to engage before running low on fuel. Surprised by FANK youth



Relief of Highway 4 Blockage

No Action by GEN Abrams in Exercising his Incomparable Missed Opportunity for achieving a Winning War gave PAVN/Khmer Rouge Control of a Large Portion of Cambodia

- Nixon proclaimed the incursion to be "the most successful military operation of the entire war."
- Abrams was of like mind, believing that time had been bought for the pacification of the South Vietnamese countryside and that U.S. and ARVN forces had been made safe from any attack out of Cambodia during 1971 and 1972.
- A "decent interval" had been obtained for the final American withdrawal. ARVN General Tran Dinh Tho was more skeptical:
- Despite its spectacular results...it must be recognized that the Cambodian incursion proved, in the long run, to *pose little more than a temporary disruption* of North Vietnam's march toward domination of all of Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

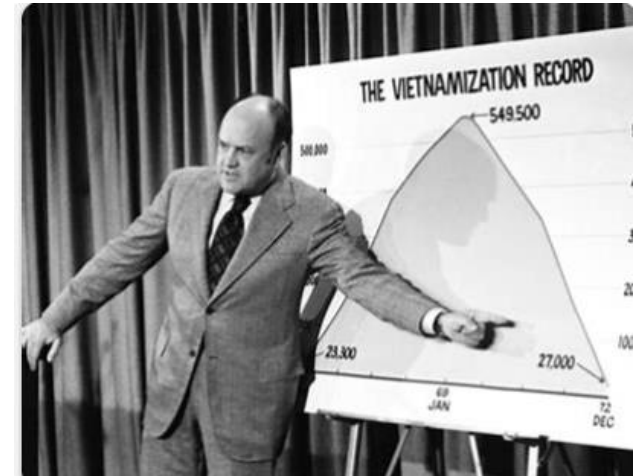


Areas of Cambodia under PAVN/VC/Khmer Rouge control by August 1970

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird's Announcement of Expedited Withdrawals from Vietnam By October 15 and December 31, 1970 and Between January and May 1971

Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)

- ▶ **Secretary Laird proposes to proceed with an expedited drawdown in the authorized ceiling of our forces in Vietnam between now and Christmas 1970**
- ▶ In addition to the reduction in our troop levels of 50,000 to be accomplished by October 15, **Secretary Laird will reduce the authorized ceiling by another 40,000 between October 15 and December 31, 1970.**
- ▶ BG Haig to Kissinger - I am not sure that you have any conception of the degree to which Laird has painted the President into a corner on our Vietnam troop levels
- ▶ The most serious aspect of this problem is that we are no longer able to correct it even if the President decided to do so because of the insidious way in which Laird reduced draft calls and thereby has made it totally impossible for the Army to maintain approved force levels in Vietnam even if Laird had provided the money.
- ▶ My discussions with the Army Staff and members of the Joint Staff confirm that Laird has under-funded the Army to a degree that it will no longer be possible to come anywhere near meeting the levels we had anticipated for the remainder of the fiscal year



Even worse, Laird established draft quotas of 10,000 a month which have already deprived the Army of the ability to provide the force levels necessary to meet the goals we were considering even if the funds were made available.

NSM 99 Strategy Options for Cambodia, Washington, Sept 14, 1970

There were a total of four strategies identified in regards to supporting the Government of Cambodia (GOC) and its Relationship to Vietnamization

—**Strategy 1: *A Minimum Resources Strategy*** (OSD's option) that deems the GOC non-essential to Vietnamization and precludes RVNAF defense of the GOC (or with Laird's caveat does not preclude RVNAF involvement but prohibits U.S. support for it.) No additional U.S. military assistance would be provided to the GOC although \$45 million in available economic assistance would be provided.

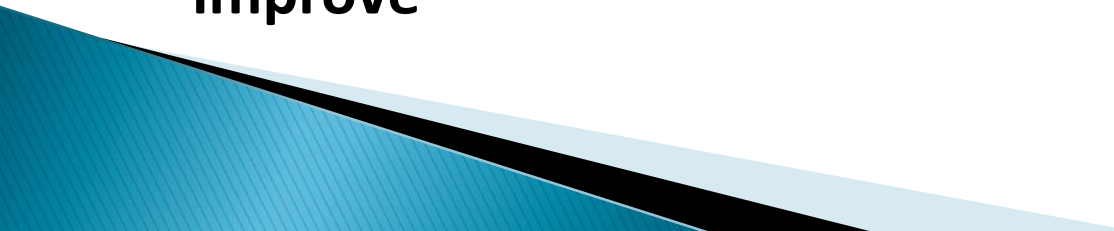
—**Strategy 2: *A Limited Resource/Involvement Strategy*** (State's preference) which deems the preservation of the GOC non-essential to Vietnamization, precludes (unequivocally) RVNAF involvement to defend the GOC (as opposed to cross-border operations), but calls for an additional \$100 million in U.S. economic and **military assistance to give the GOC the chance to go it alone.**

—**Strategy 3: *A Defense of a Viable GOC Strategy*** which uses RVNAF as necessary to defend GOC on territory ranging from one-fifth to one half of Cambodia depending on the variant chosen. This option can be defended either from a judgment that the **preservation of the GOC is essential to Vietnamization success** (the JCS view) or that it is beneficial to Vietnamization even with some RVNAF involvement in Cambodia (JCS Preference).


—**Strategy 4: *Offensive Operations in South Laos and Northern Cambodia*** could be conducted as part of a strategy to defend Cambodia. Logically, this option is not an alternative to the three preceding options

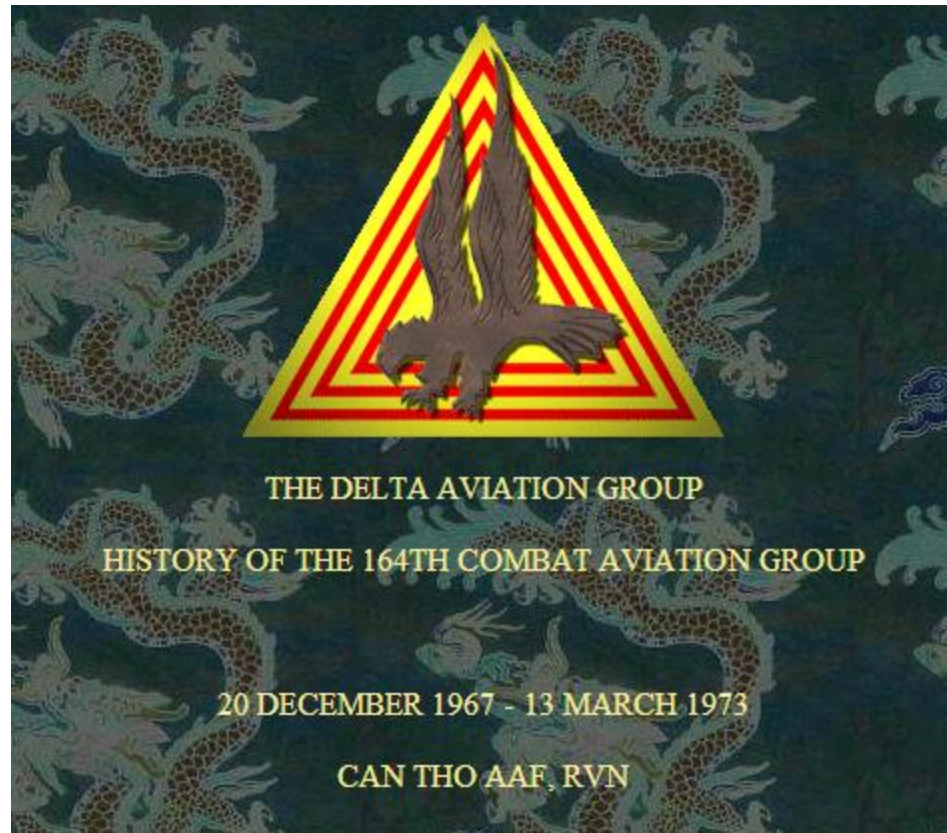
NSSM 99 Cambodia Strategy Study Conclusions

Washington, September 15, 1970

- ▶ **The Senior Review Group (SRG) agreed that from a military standpoint, Strategy 3, Variant 3, as outlined in the VSSG Working Paper 2 states the preferred objective, which is to maintain the Cambodian Government in control of the half of the country that includes the capital, populated areas, and port.**
 - ▶ **The SRG also agreed that in seeking to achieve this objective, the US should aim at building up the capabilities of the Cambodian forces so as to minimize the need for significant long-term intervention by the ARVN.**
 - ▶ **The SRG noted that the requirement for involvement of South Vietnamese forces in the defense of Cambodia should decline as the capabilities of the Cambodian forces improve**
- 

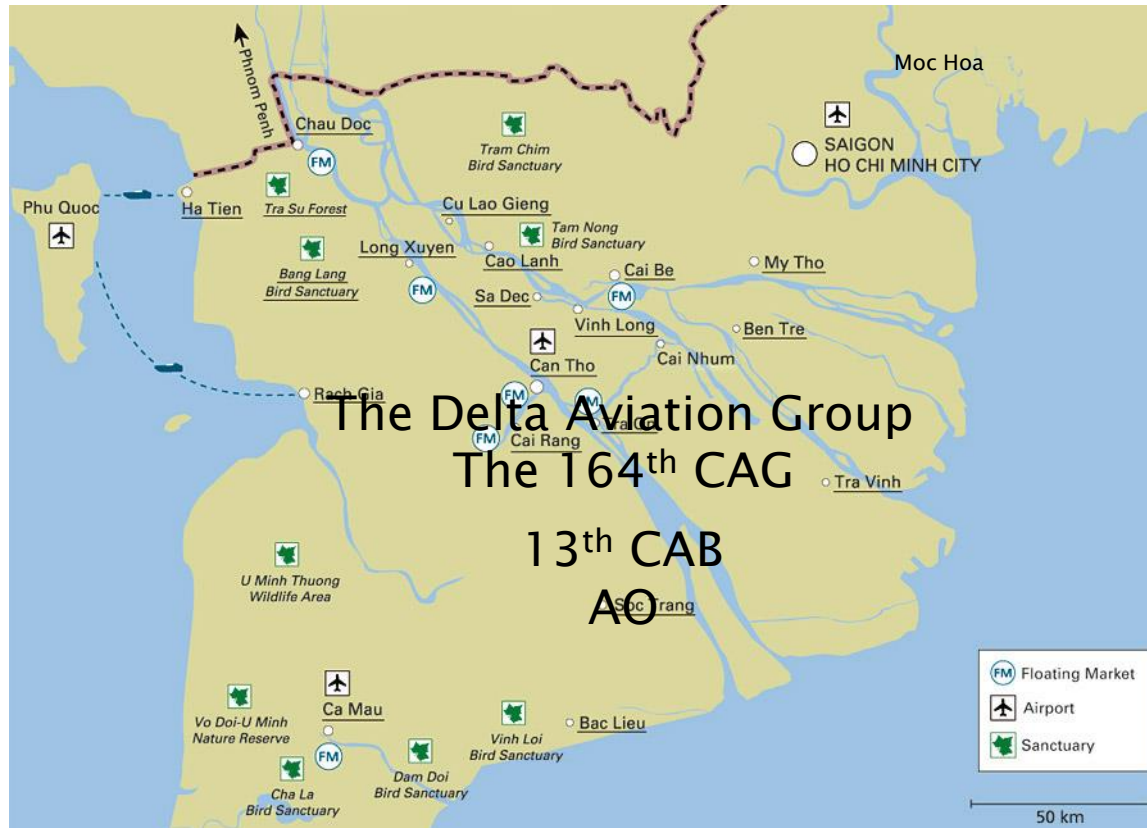
Supporting Conclusions that the Vietnam War Could Have Been Won in 1970

- ▶ From this author's perspective, the Opportunity to militarily Win the Vietnam War was to execute the Incomparable Opportunity to Win the War in Cambodia in 1970 .
 - ▶ However, this Incomparable Opportunity was not executed by GEN Abrams and President Nixon.
 - ▶ Evidence that this could have led to winning the Vietnam War was cited by Nixon Advisers, George Shultz and Eric Ehrlichman in a White House Meeting in Fall 1970.
 - ▶ George Shultz, coming back from Vietnam said he learned "without Cambodia we would be dead".
 - ▶ President Nixon's senior advisor Ehrlichman commented, "Cambodia was the big thing".
 - ▶ Listen, he told Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's National Security Adviser (NSA), "Cambodia won the war. I think we have them on the defensive". Kissinger agreed.
- 



The 164th Aviation Group (Combat) was activated on 20 December 1967, at Dempsey Compound, Can Tho, RVN. The 13th Combat Aviation Battalion and the 307th Combat Aviation Battalion, both comprised of companies that had seen duty in Vietnam prior to the activation of the 164th CAG, were assigned to the Group.

The Mekong Delta: Bread Basket for Vietnam and Home of the 164th CAG and 13th CAB

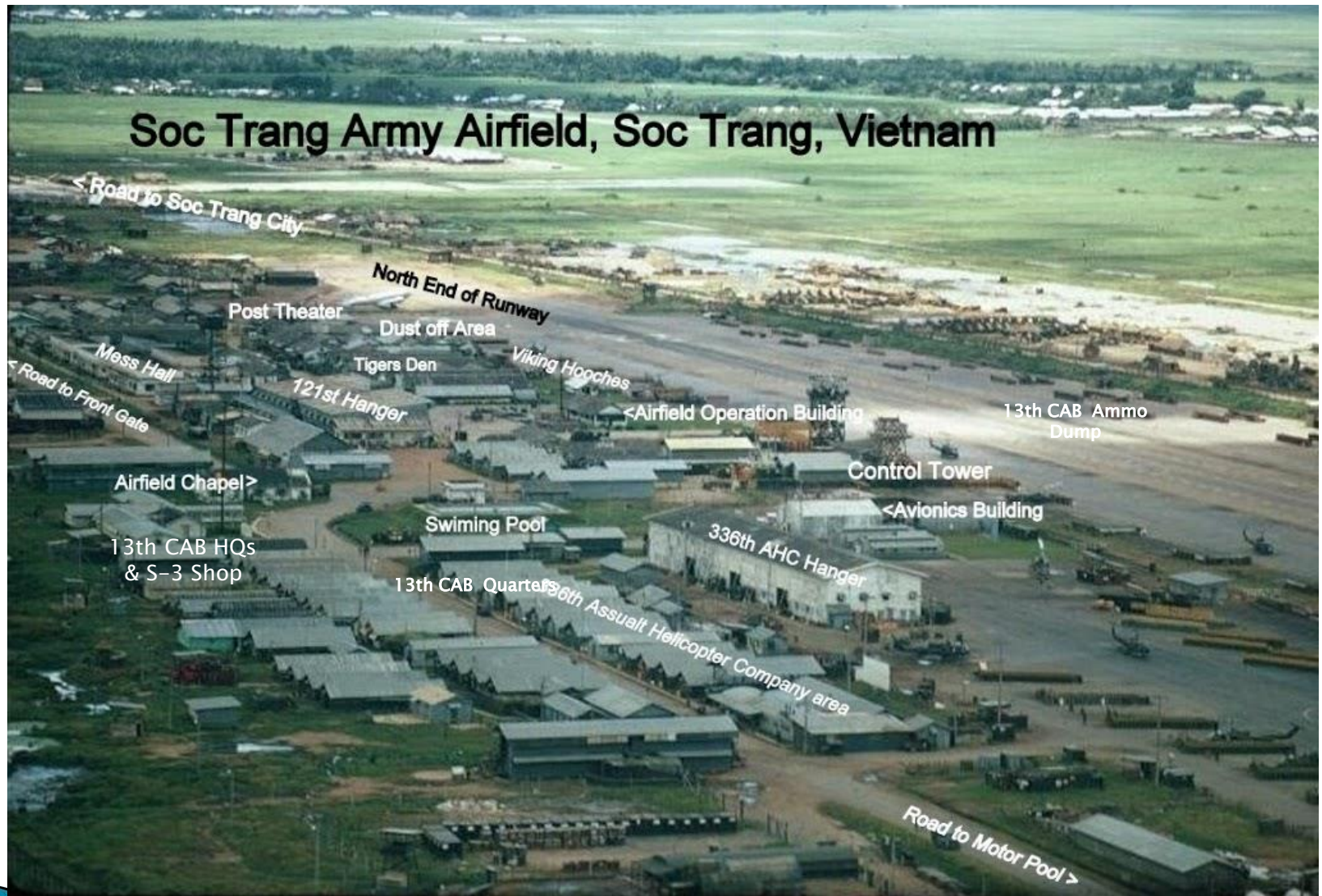


Guardians of the Mekong

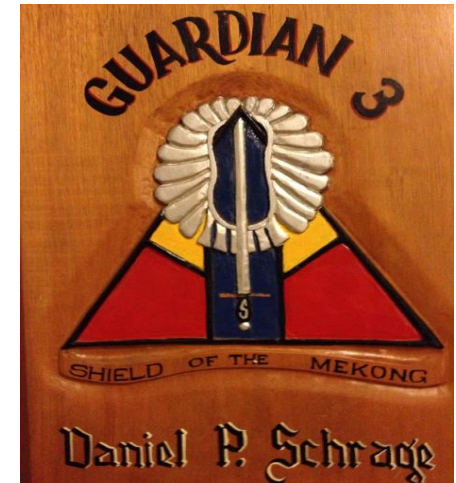
162nd Assault Helicopter Co.
121st Assault Helicopter Co.
191st Assault Helicopter Co.
221st Recon Airplane Co.
336th Assault Helicopter Co.
C Troop, 16th Air Cavalry

13th CAB Units
1970

Soc Trang Army Airfield



13th Combat Aviation Battalion, Can Tho – Soc Trang- Can Tho – 1970-71



Guardians of the Mekong

162nd Assault Helicopter Co.
121st Assault Helicopter Co.
191st Assault Helicopter Co.
221st Recon Airplane Co.
336th Assault Helicopter Co.
C Troop, 16th Air Cavalry



FROM THE MEN OF THE GUARDIAN
3 SHOP TO THE GUARDIAN 3.
"AS USUAL GUARDIAN WAS PERFECT
IN ALL RESPECTS"

CPT Schrage as Asst S-3/S-3 of the 13th CAB in Soc Trang, July-Dec. 1970



CPT Daniel P. Schage

Combat Decorations Vietnam War



**CPT Schrage receiving Distinguished
Flying Cross (DFC)**



**CPT Schrage having received
Bronze Star Medal (BSM)**



**CPT Schrage receiving Soldiers
Medal (SM)**

Helicopter Vietnamization

U.S. President Richard Nixon's Policy of Vietnamization, which had begun under President Lyndon Johnson, stressed turning over more of the war to Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Crewmen line up before one of the 62 UH-1 Huey helicopters given them on November 4, 1970, along with command of the Soc Trang Airfield

Did it Work?

- Not very well. VNAF and ARVN did not like each other
- USAF Advisors not familiar with Airmobile Operations
- VNAF helicopter mechanics Ineffective and in Short Supply



Impact on Winning the War

- Loss of 13th CAB for Support of 21st ARVN
- Loss of Soc Trang AAF for Support in U Minh Forest Incursion in Spring 1971
- Lack of Airmobile support for ARVN
- Divisions in Cambodia

Soc Trang Airfield, the home of the 13th CAB, was turned over to the VNAF on November 4, 1970

- ▶ As part of President Nixon's **Vietnamization Program**, the Soc Trang Airfield was the **first facility turned over** to the VNAF and their USAF Advisors
- ▶ The helicopter assets of the 121st AHC and the 336th AHC were **transferred** to the VNAF
- ▶ This was a major event with **USA Secretary of State William Rogers, USAF Secretary Seamans and General Creighton Abrams** attending the Turnover Ceremony along with 21st ARVN Div CG
- ▶ Following this event the 13th CAB HQS **was moved** to Can Tho
- ▶ This version of **Helicopter Vietnamization was doomed to failure**
 - VNAF and ARVN strongly disliked each other, especially the 21st ARVN
 - USAF Advisors did not understand or care to understand Airmobile Operations with helicopters; they were more interested in TV reception & air conditioning
 - Many VNAF pilots were trained, but insufficient number of maintenance and support personnel were trained along with an inadequate support structure
 - On Army helicopters a crew chief and door gunner flew with the helicopter, conducted maintenance and understood the status of the aircraft; On Air Force aircraft a separate maintenance company worked on the aircraft

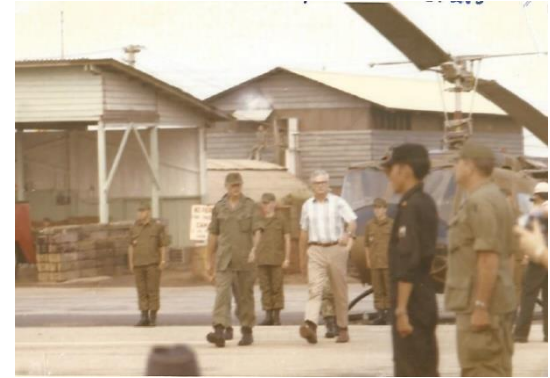
Soc Trang AAF Transfer Ceremony November 4, 1970



U.S. Secretary of State Rogers shaking hands with CPT Schrage



Soc Trang AAF Control Tower



USAF Secretary Seamans and Gen Abrams Approach



CPT Schrage at Soc Trang AAF Transfer



VIPs on Reviewing Stand



CPT Schrage at Soc Trang AAF Transfer

VIPs on Reviewing Stand: Dr. Robert C. Seamans, Secretary of the Air Force; GEN Creighton Abrams, U.S. Army Vietnam Commander; GEN. Lucius Clay, 7th Air Force Commander, and Vietnamese GEN. Minh, CG 21st ARVN Division

13th CAB CO LTC Robert Sauers transfers 121st and 336th AHCs Helicopters to VNAF in October 1970



121st AHC "Soc Trang Tigers"



336th AHC Warriors"



Transfer of 121st & 336th AHC Helicopters to VNAF

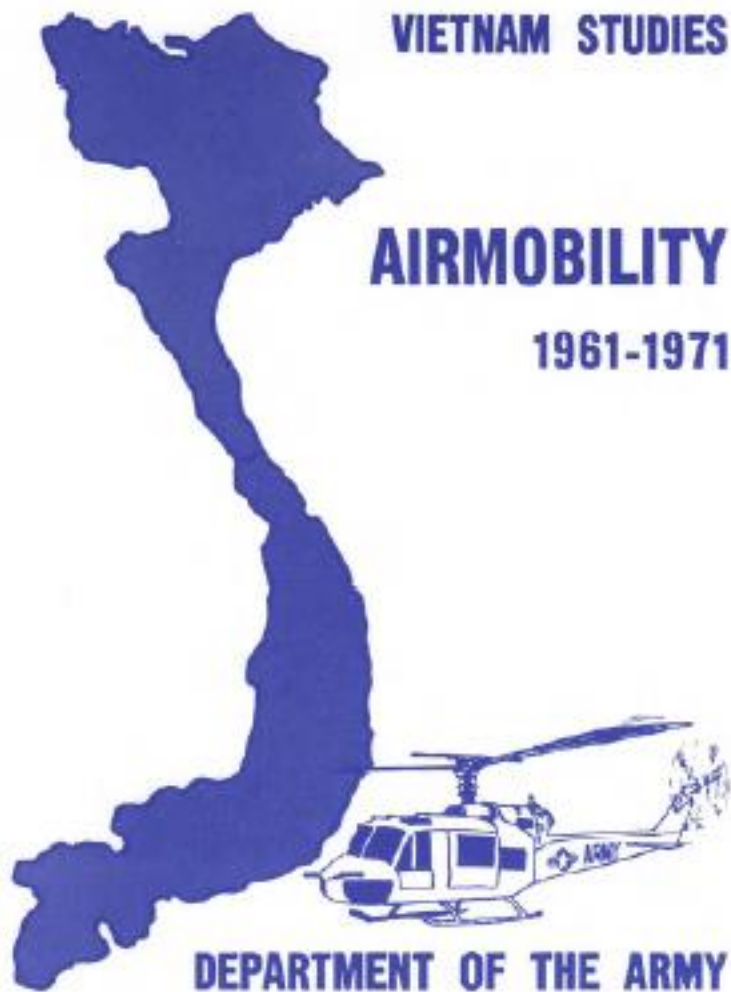


121st and 336th AHCs Welcome Signs in the Soc Trang AAF

AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971


By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY WASHINGTON, D.C., 1999



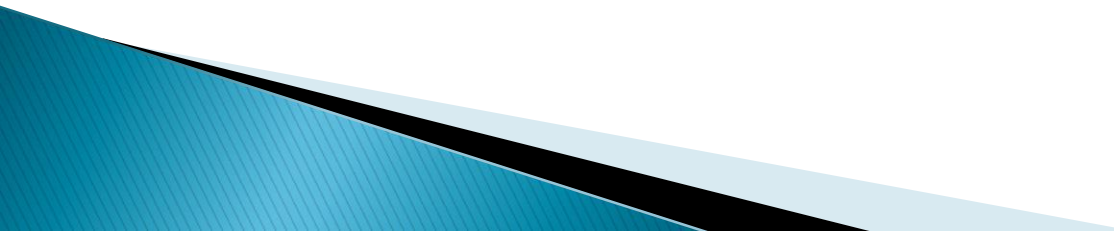
AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ The purpose of this study is to **trace the evolution of airmobility** in the U.S. Army.
 - ▶ The integration of aircraft into the organic structure of the ground forces is as radical a change as the move from the horse to the truck, *and the process is only beginning.*
 - ▶ Although Vietnam was the first large combat test of airmobility, air assault operations in Southeast Asia would not have been possible without certain key decisions a decade earlier.
 - ▶ This study attempts to trace the most important milestones which led to the eventual formation of airmobile divisions.
- 

AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ For the reader who has borne with me through this account of ten years of air mobility in Vietnam and the fundamental decisions in the decade preceding that, the obvious question is, "What does all of this mean?"
 - ▶ The one inescapable conclusion is that the **air mobility concept is irreversible.**
 - ▶ The thousands of officers who have learned to think and fight and live in three dimensions will never allow themselves to be restricted to two dimensions in the future.
 - ▶ Air mobility will change and grow, but it is here to stay.
- 

AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

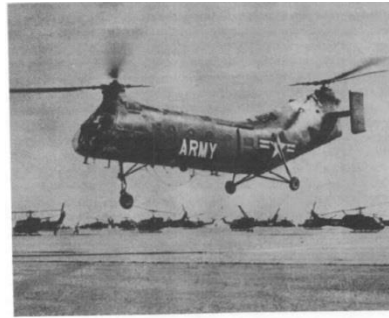
By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ However, there is **much more to airmobility than just using helicopters.**
- ▶ The Huey, the Cobra, the light observation helicopter, and the Chinook were the **essential vehicles of airmobile combat and combat support.**
- ▶ But, the **essence of an airmobile division is the ability to integrate the capabilities of these aircraft into an organization** designed for their use by people specially trained for their use.
- ▶ This total integration is **only possible in a unit which "owns" its helicopters.**

The Primary Vietnam Helicopters 1961-1971



CH-47 CHINOOK (A,B,&C MODELS)



CH-21C SHAWNEE



UH-1B IROQUOIS



UH-1D IROQUOIS



UH-1C IROQUOIS



CH-54 TARHE



OH-6A CAYUSE



AH-1C HUEY COBRA



OH-58A KIOWA

AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ The tactical advantages of the airmobile division can be summed up as follows: **increased efficiency due to the repeated association of units; thorough integration of its assets because of close association and command relationships; and the ability to take a different conceptual approach because of its assured assets.**
- ▶ The impact of organizational and command relationships has a direct and distinct impact on the quality of support.
- ▶ There is no denying that **general support units rarely tend to identify closely with the supported unit**, at least not as closely as organic units.
- ▶ This is a simple truism of human nature.

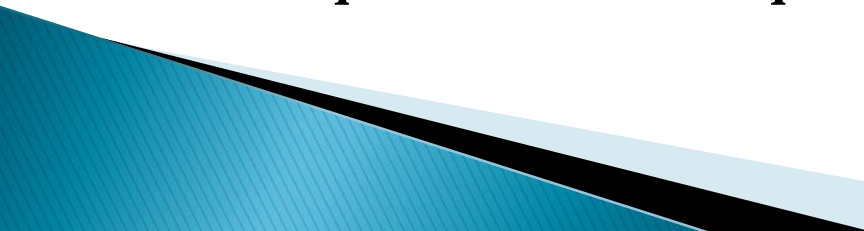
AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ The epitome of "superior" airmobile tactics, as contrasted with "good," is the capability **to exploit not only an opportunity but the trends and changing patterns in enemy activity.**
- ▶ This requires a flexibility which is **much more difficult to initiate and accomplish** when non-divisional units are involved.
- ▶ This is **particularly true of air cavalry.**
- ▶ More than any other unit, the air cavalry development in Vietnam has **proven the need for quick reaction to meet the demands of the situation** as seen by the commander on the scene.
- ▶ Adaptation to a change in environment is more feasible and more likely **when the unit is organic.**

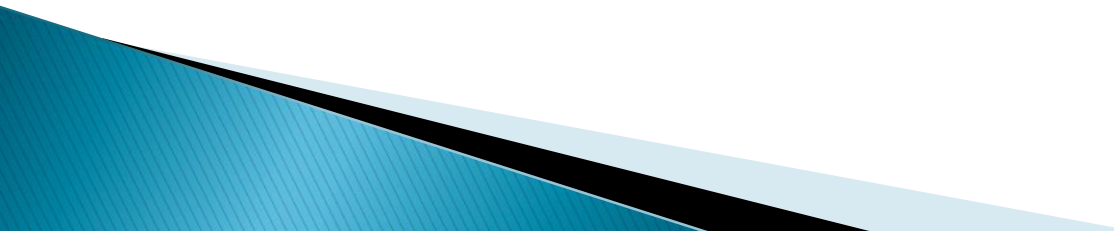
AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ In any activity where two Services operate the interface between them **will seldom be a comfortable enmeshing of capabilities** whether these capabilities are competitive, supplementary, or complementary.
 - ▶ Army-Air Force aviation relationships **are no exception.**
 - ▶ The important thing to recognize is that there **are gaps more often than overlaps** in all areas of the interface.
 - ▶ This has occurred because each Service is able to **provide less of a capability**, at least in qualitative terms, than is militarily desirable.
 - ▶ This is **especially true as we look to more sophisticated threats** throughout the world.
 - ▶ In my estimation, **quantitative duplication is a myth**, because **seldom will relatively scarce and expensive vehicles** such as aircraft be adequate to meet all requirements.
- 

AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

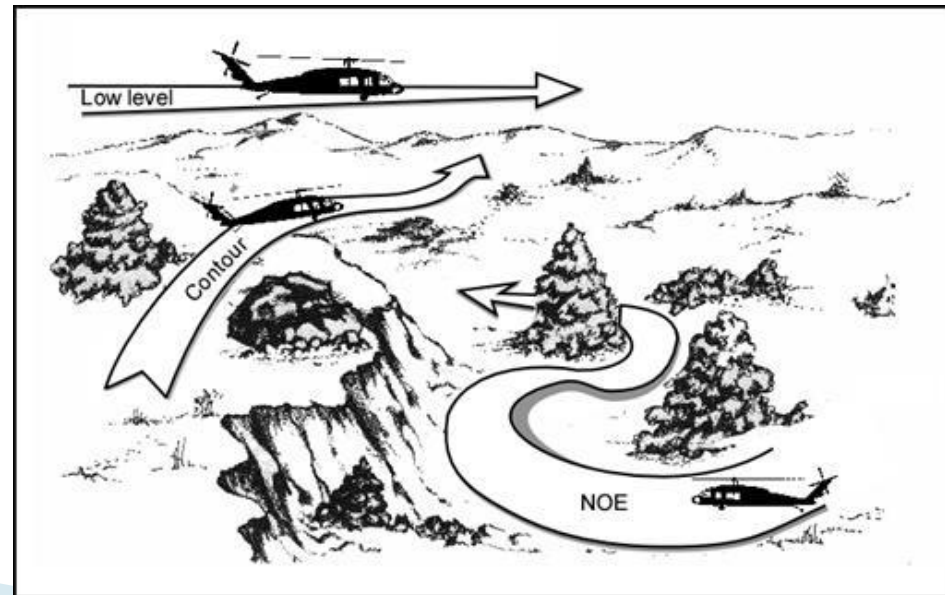
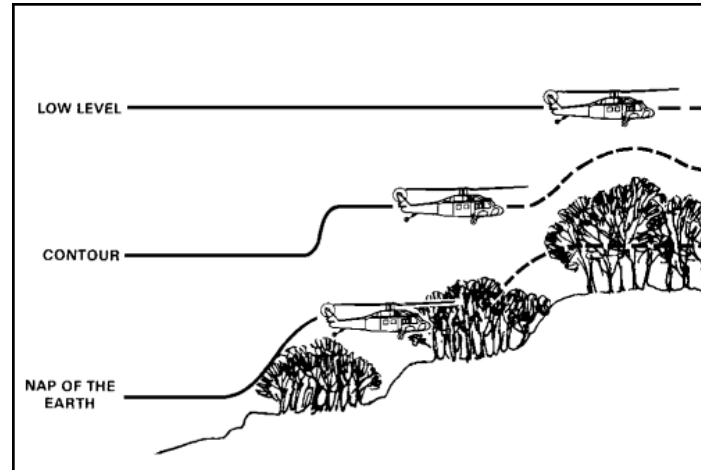
- ▶ Another myth-one that has haunted Army aviation for thirty years-is **vulnerability**.
 - ▶ Throughout this volume we have touched on various aspects of the vulnerability of Army aircraft and, in particular, the helicopter.
 - ▶ Nevertheless, the subject is **still uppermost in the minds** of those **who have honest reservations** on the soundness of future airmobile tactics.
- 

Rotary Wing Terrain Flight

(FM 3-04.203, Chapter 5)

- ▶ To survive and accomplish the mission, **combat aviation units must use tactics** that degrade an enemy's capability to detect aircraft.
- ▶ **Darkness protects** aircrews **from visual and optical acquisition** by threat.
- ▶ **Darkness will not**, however, protect aviation elements **from electronic detection**.
- ▶ Terrain flight is a **tactic** that uses terrain, vegetation, and manmade objects **to mask aircraft from visual, optical, thermal, and electronic detection systems**.
- ▶ This tactic **involves a constant awareness of capabilities and positions** of enemy weapons and detection means in relation to masking terrain features and flight routes.
- ▶ The **most effective combination for detection avoidance is flying terrain flight altitudes at night**.
- ▶ The **ability to perform night terrain flight** depends on ambient light level, flight proficiency, terrain familiarity, & effective use of various NVDs

Terrain Flight, especially Nap Of the Earth (NOE) Flight Is a Key for Aircraft Survivability



AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ The Army's decision to **standardize on a utility tactical transport helicopter** has **far-reaching implications** on every operation from its planning to its execution.
- ▶ Literally hundreds of our key battles **could not have been fought without a light, agile machine** that could go into improbable landing zones at a critical time.
- ▶ Had the Army **chosen to build its airmobile tactics around a "platoon carrier,"** different and less flexible tactics would have been forced on our commanders.
- ▶ As we move to replace the Huey fleet, we **must never lose sight of the essential characteristics** that made the Huey invaluable to the Infantry commander.
- ▶ **Technology offers so many tempting alternatives** that one can easily forget the **basic problems of squad tactics.**
- ▶ The **vital lessons** which we learned in the "sizing" of our helicopter fleet **dare not be forgotten.**

AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ Similar principles must be kept in mind in our future helicopter gunships.
- ▶ There is no doubt that from a hardware standpoint **the armed helicopter was the single greatest innovation of Vietnam.**
- ▶ I trust this volume has provided **enough examples of its unique characteristics and methods of employment** to leave no doubt about its place in the support of the ground soldier.
- ▶ The **introduction of the Cobra into Vietnam vindicated all the hypotheses of the armed helicopter pioneers** who were derided in their early experiments.
- ▶ The **Cobra came at the right time in sufficient numbers** to do a job that no other fire support means could do
- ▶ In **LAMSON 719**, if it proved any point at all, **proved that the Cobra could survive under high intensity warfare** while the older Huey gunship merely showed deficiencies that we knew had always existed.

C Troop, 16th Cav Aircraft with UH-1D, OH-6A, and AH-1G Helicopters in the 13th CAB was a Very Valuable Asset and a Favorite of the 21st ARVN Division in the Mekong Delta in 1970-71

The Patches for the Attack Helicopter *Mustangs*; the Lift Ship *Four Horseman* and the Scout “Loach” *Outcasts*



AIRMOBILITY 1961-1971

By Lieutenant General John J. Tolson

- ▶ The **story of airmobility in Vietnam** is almost certainly just the first chapter of a new and dynamic Army.
- ▶ The glamour of airmobility has long passed, **but the challenges are as great as ever.**
- ▶ Some of the **technological forecast**, just dimly seen by the early planners, **is now reality.**
- ▶ If this study has **served any purpose besides its bibliography**, which I think is most important, it **will form part of the corporate memory for those planners of the future** who would like not to pay the terrible price of relearning again in combat many costly lessons.
- ▶ As the poet-diplomat Paul Claudell once observed, "It is not enough to know the past, **it is necessary to understand it.**"

Development of the Next Generation of Army Aviation Systems, Book 2 of Trilogy

NASA/Navy/Sikorsky
XH-59A Coaxial
Research Aircraft
1960s-70s



NASA/Army/Bell
XV-15 Tilt Rotor
Research Aircraft
1960s-70s

The Next Generation of Army Aviation Systems

Sikorsky
LHX Coaxial
Concept
1982-84



Bell
LHX Tilt Rotor
Concept
1982-84

Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk Bell OH-58D Kiowa Warrior Hughes AH-64 Apache

Lockheed/Sikorsky
Army FLRRA
Coaxial Compound
2019-2022



Bell/Boeing
Army FLRRA
Tilt Rotor
2019-2022

Army/Sikorsky/Boeing Comanche Program-1980s-90s

Documents the Decision Making in the President Nixon's Administration, July 1970-January 1972

**FOREIGN
RELATIONS
OF THE
UNITED
STATES**

1969-1976

VOLUME VII

**VIETNAM
JULY 1970-
JANUARY 1972**

Key Decisions Made during Nixon Administration, July 1970-January 1972

- ▶ General Lon Nol overthrew Prince Sihanouk as Premier of Cambodia in March 1970 with the intent of making it a democracy and he gave the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) three days to get out of Cambodia
- ▶ He also shut down Sihanoukville and its Trail as the main source of NVA supplies and weapons into the Mekong Delta and III Corps and IV Corps
- ▶ He also submitted a letter to President Nixon in early July 1970 seeking extensive support from the US for the Government of Cambodia (GOC), including Helicopters
- ▶ In the August 1970 response to Lon Nol's request for helicopters the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) agreed that the armored cars and helicopters should not be approved.
- ▶ In memorandum CM-178-70, August 25, Admiral Moorer informed Laird that he had worked out a plan with McCain and Abrams, which provided for helicopters to be operated and maintained by VNAF but located in Phnom Penh. However, it doesn't appear to have been implemented.
- ▶ In President Nixon's response to Lon Nol in late August 1970 there was only \$40M offered in small arms, etc. transferred from other US Allies, such as Indonesia ; however, other aid was later identified, but too late.

Why a Coalition Boundary of Cambodia, South Vietnam and US Forces was Required in 1970-71

With the withdrawal of U.S. Ground Forces Defense of MRs III and IV in South Vietnam and Southern Cambodia should have been the focus with 164th CAG providing air mobility and support



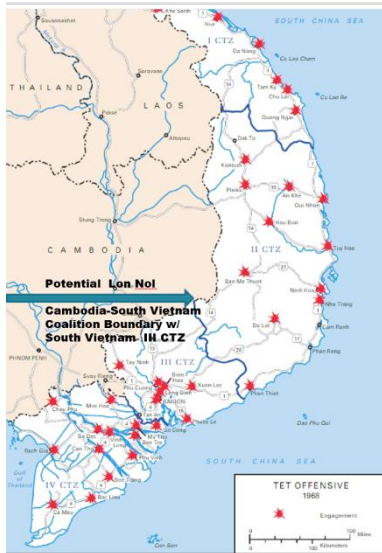
Numerous Infiltration routes into South Vietnam couldn't be controlled



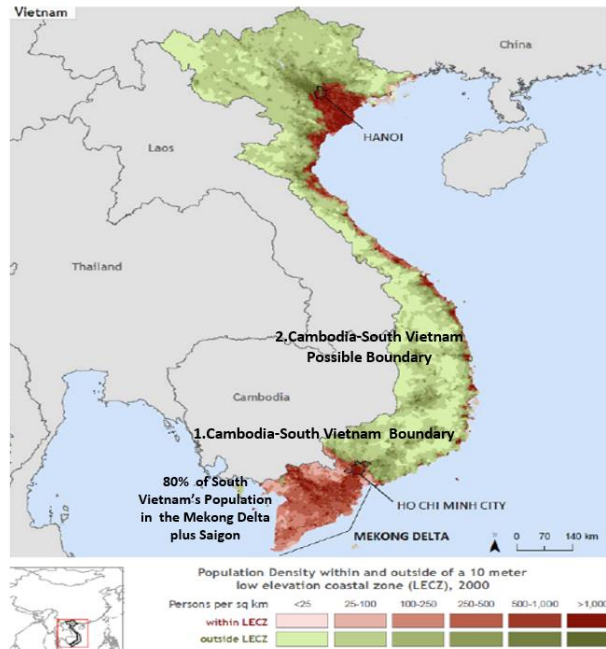
Sihanoukville and Trail Shutdown
As Infiltration into Mekong Delta

A 1970 Opportunity for a Coalition between Cambodia, South Vietnam and US Forces was a possibility to win the Vietnam War

Justification for the Boundary for the Coalition is Illustrated Below



Boundary can Capture Controlled Areas following Tet 68 Offensive Victories in III&IV Corps

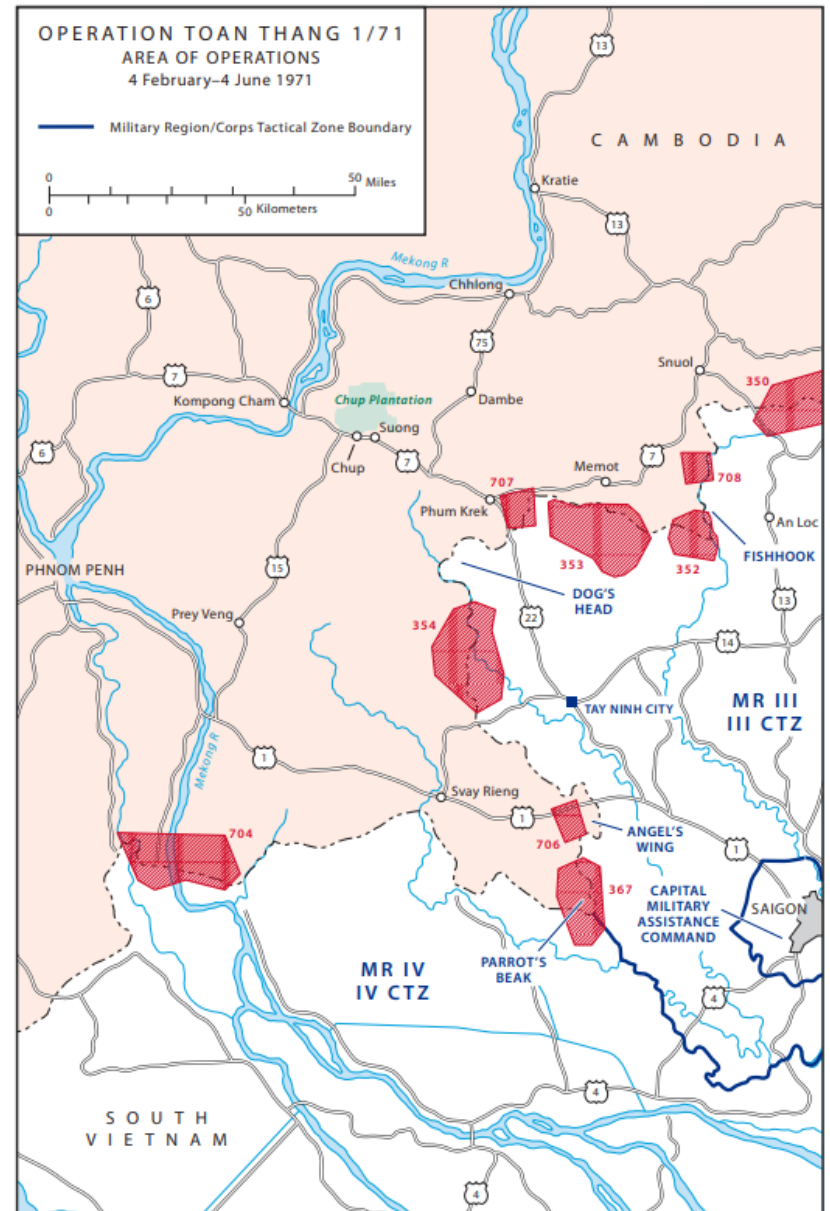


Boundary can Capture Culture, Bread Baskets and Population Density Areas in both Cambodia & South Vietnam




Easter Offensive in 1972 in Fish Hook from III Corps showed again the ARVN could fight and win battles. However, ARVN was overmatched in Lamson 719

ARVN Follow-on Operations in 1971



Lessons Learned from Vietnam that are Relevant to Post Vietnam and Today

- ▶ **Airmobile Operations will be essential for future warfare** and must be included as Direct Combat and Integral Combat Support vice General Support
 - ▶ Boots on the Ground do not have to be US troops if the ground force **is properly trained and disciplined**, such as the 21st ARVN and 9th ARVN Divisions in the Mekong Delta
 - ▶ While airmobile operations in Vietnam were at the tactical level and provided unit support at the battalion and company level, **can this be sustained in the future?**
 - ▶ LTG John J. Tolson's **1961-1971 Airmobility Study**, 1999 should be reviewed.
- 

Follow On Proposed Efforts

- ▶ I would like to see material from this presentation be utilized by the Army Center of Military History, as well as Fox Nation
 - ▶ I plan to give a paper entitled: “Extended Use of Strategic Air mobility in Cambodia Could Have Won the Vietnam War in 1970” in the History Session at Vertical Flight Society (VFS) Forum in West Palm Beach, FL, May 2023
 - ▶ I plan to work with Mike Law, VHPA, and have a follow-on session at the 2023 VHPA Reunion in San Antonio, July 2023.
 - ▶ I plan to propose some of this presentation be part of a 60th Memorial series honoring the Vietnam War veterans.
 - ▶ I would like to have the VHPA team with VFS, the Army Center of Military History, The Vietnam Center & Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech, and the West Chester University and the American Helicopter Museum and Education Center in Pennsylvania in organizing and participating in History Sessions in 2023, the 60th Anniversary of The Vietnam War
- 