

The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam: February 1962 July 1965

In November 1961, President Kennedy decided that the United States would assume a growing military role in Vietnam. The U.S. command structure in Vietnam, had become overextended even before this decision and had to be reorganized. The new command was named the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV).

Planners generally agreed that the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, should have full responsibility for and authority over all U.S. Military activities and operations in Vietnam.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed forming a unified command that would report directly to them. The Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) objected to the joint Chiefs' proposal. He believed that the Communists were threatening all of Southeast Asia, not just South Vietnam; therefore, a single military effort, co-ordinated by the CINCPAC was required. Accordingly, he suggested forming a subordinate unified command in Vietnam under the Pacific Command.

The Department of State concurred with CINCPAC's proposal provided the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam would retain over-all authority of U.S. activities in the country.

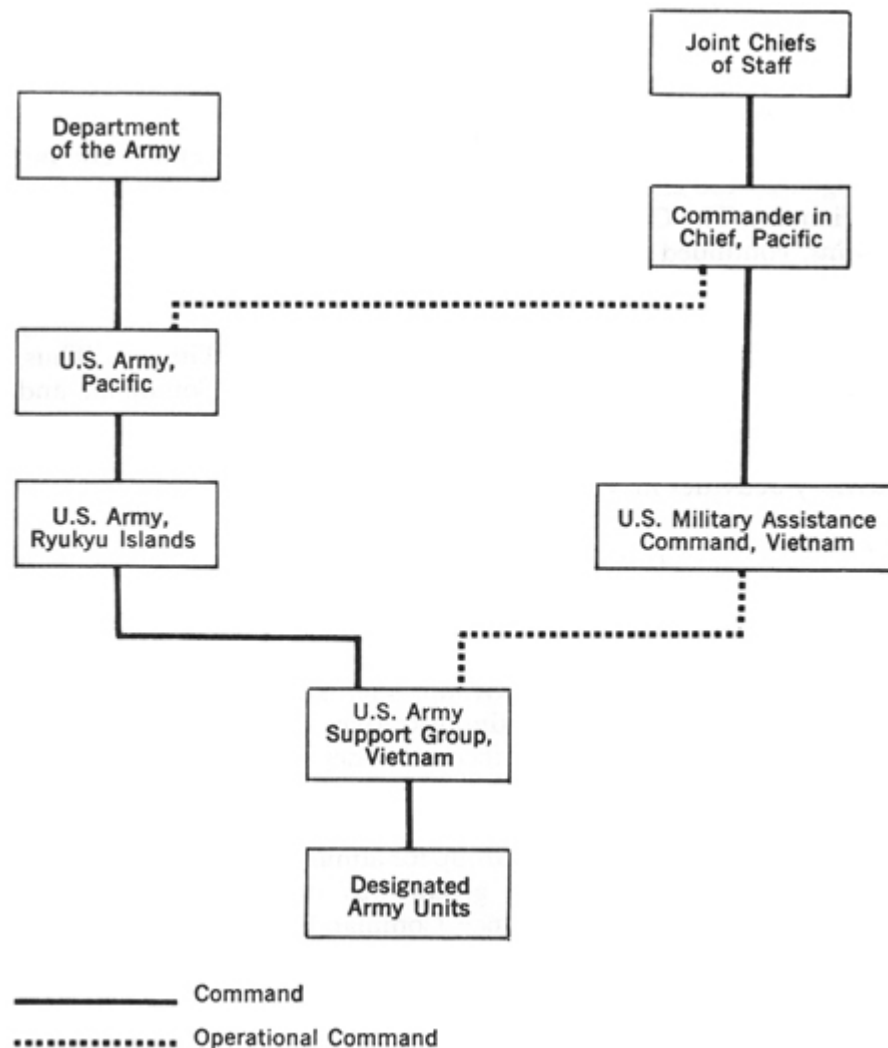
With the approval of President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense McNamara and by direction of the joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC (Admiral Felt) established the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) on 8 February 1962, as a subordinate unified command under his control. Lieutenant General Paul D. Harkins, was MACV's first commander. In his new position, General Harkins was the senior U.S. Military commander in the Republic of Vietnam and, as such, responsible for U.S. Military policy, operations, and assistance there.

With an initial authorized strength of 216 men MACV was envisaged as a temporary headquarters that would be withdrawn once the Viet Cong insurgency was brought under control.

After the Military Assistance Command had been established, the Pacific Air Forces formed the 2nd Advance Squadron in Vietnam. It functioned as the air component command.

On 15 May 1962 General Harkins' responsibilities broadened when Admiral Felt established the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Thailand (USMACTHAI), and

appointed General Harkins its commander. In this capacity General Harkins had essentially the same latitude and authority as in his position as head of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.



U.S. COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS IN VIETNAM, 1962. Source: Department of Army Management Review Team, Review and Analysis of the Army Command and Control Structure in Vietnam, Vol. II (Washington: 29 July 1968), p. AV-12.

In September 1962, the Pacific Air Forces' 2d Advance Squadron, the largest U.S. Air Force headquarters in Southeast Asia outside the Philippines, was expanded and redesignated 2d Air Division. The division controlled most operations of the Pacific Air

Forces of the mainland of Southeast Asia. The command channel originated with the Commander in Chief, Pacific, went to the commander of the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam and Thailand, and then to the commanding general of the 2d Air Division; the Pacific Air Forces provided administrative and logistical support.

Since naval activity in Southeast Asia had not significantly increased, a naval component command was not established.

During 1962 the strength of U.S. military personnel in Vietnam rose from about 1,000 to over 11,000 men.

Army-Air Force Relations

In October 1962 CINCPAC Admiral Felt assigned General Harkins the task of organizing and directing an airlift system in Southeast Asia. This directive raised command problems between the U.S. Army and Air Force. The problems centered around the functions of the air operations centers in Vietnam. The Air Force interpreted the term "air" as embracing all aircraft and wanted all aviation units, including those from the Army, to report to Air Force control facilities. Army commanders felt that Army aviation elements should be controlled by the ground commander.