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# SPECIAL REPORT

NORTH VIETNAM'S MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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## NORTH VIETNAM'S MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT

Since 1954, when the Geneva accords were signed and French influence disappeared, North Vietnam has built up the most formidable military force in Southeast Asia. This establishment, primarily a ground army with no tactical air and little naval capability, does not yet compare favorably with modern Western armies. However, drawing on the experience of the war in Indochina, it has developed a highly specialized capability to support and maintain insurgency operations in adjacent countries. In Laos, North Vietnamese combat forces entered the conflict at a critical moment in early 1961 and saved the day for the pro-Communist Pathet Lao. In South Vietnam, the Viet Cong organization has received direction, inspiration, and material aid from North Vietnam.

### The Army

North Vietnam emerged in 1954 from the eight-year Indochinese war with an experienced cadre skilled in subversion, infiltration, and guerrilla warfare. Using this as his base, General Vo Nguyen Giap, the commander at Dien Bien Phu and now minister of defense, launched an ambitious program to develop a modern conventional army.

Giap's program had several important provisions: standardization and modernization of equipment, organization, training, and discipline; establishment of compulsory military service including a reserve force; development of technical services; introduction of training for modern warfare; and,

underlying the whole, a heavy stress on political indoctrination of the troops. Despite many frustrations and setbacks, some caused by the need to use the army in agricultural and economic tasks, the goals he set forth have largely been met.

The overwhelming strength of the People's Army of Vietnam

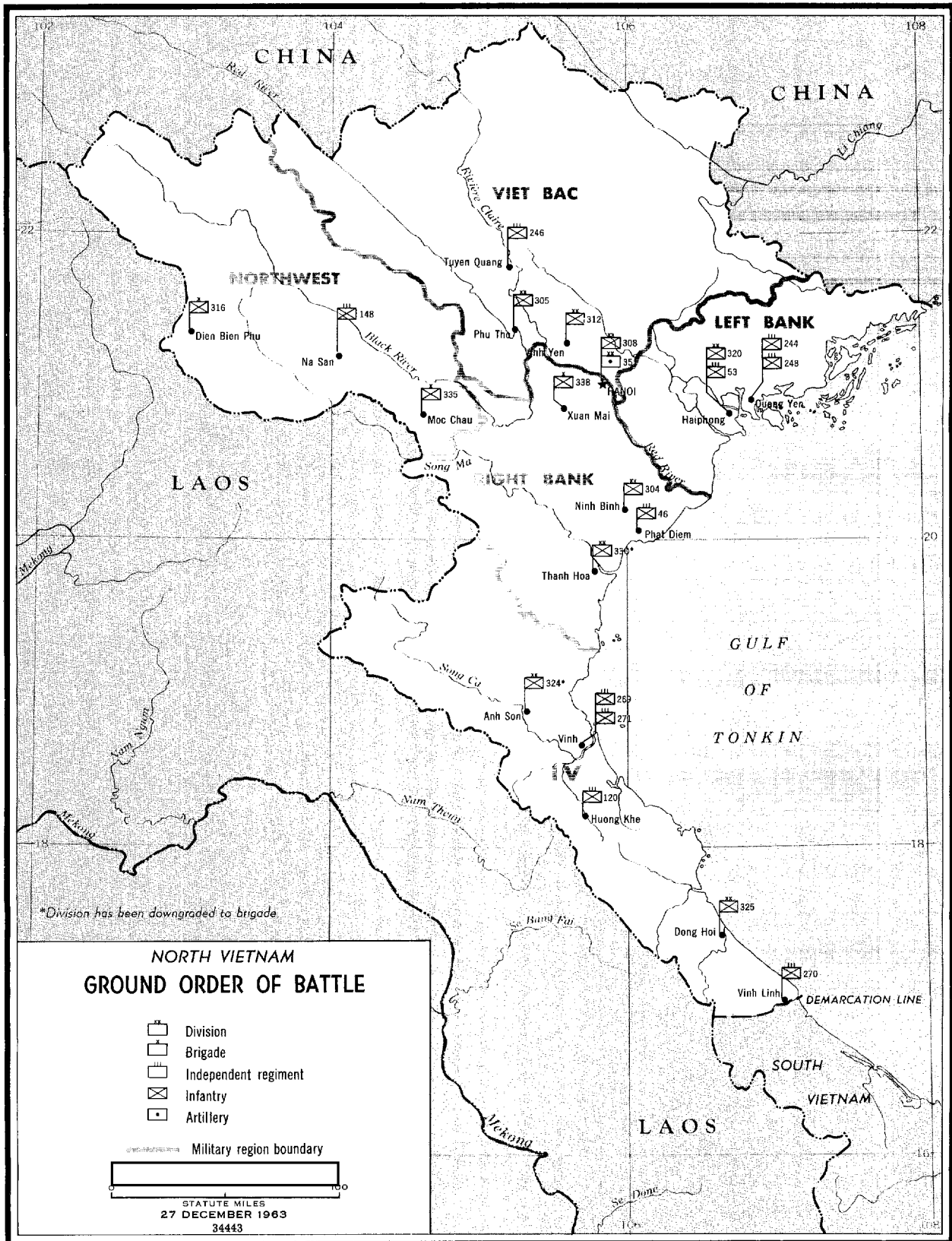


GIAP

(PAVN) lies in the ground force troops. These number 225,000 men, while the air force and navy have only 2,500 to 5,000 men each. The main ground force elements are 11 infantry divisions/brigades, 1 artillery division, and 10 independent infantry regiments, backed up by artillery, antiaircraft artillery, and engineer and other service and support units.

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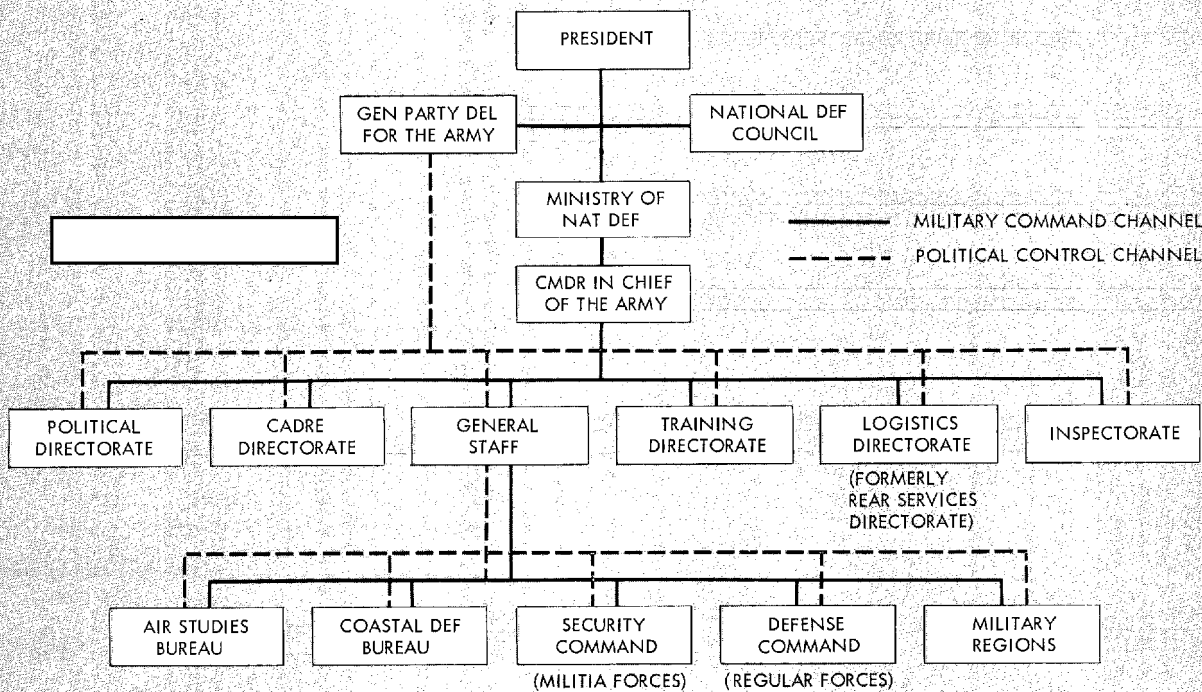
North Vietnam is divided into five military regions which primarily fulfill combat support and administrative functions comparable to the various army areas of the United States. Most of the forces are concentrated in the Hanoi-Haiphong area of the Tonkin Delta, although there are sizable troop dispositions in each military region.

The strength of the army lies principally in its highly trained, competent, and intensely loyal officer corps combined with a disciplined, tightly controlled organization. In addition,

individual North Vietnamese infantry soldiers are highly adaptable and inured to hardship. Many have had or are receiving combat experience in Hanoi-inspired insurgent movements in Laos and South Vietnam.

Participation in these "local" wars also gives the army command staffs in Hanoi valuable experience in planning, directing, and supporting insurgent activities and actual combat situations. This training has apparently added to the traditional strengths of the North Vietnamese Army: its proclivity for unconventional tactics, its high degree

ORGANIZATION OF NORTH VIETNAMESE HIGH COMMAND



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of mobility, detailed planning and study of objectives, and its prowess in political and psychological warfare.

The army has always been, and remains, completely controlled by the party and subservient to its political decisions. A major reorganization in 1960-1961 was based on the political decision to intervene in Laos and South Vietnam and this decision remains a major influencing factor underlying the present organization of the PAVN. The reorganization was an attempt to prepare the armed forces for prolonged guerrilla warfare while at the same time presenting a credible conventional threat to Southeast Asia and maintaining the internal security of the homeland.

Equipment and Logistics

North Vietnam has depended almost entirely on Communist China for heavier firepower, better transportation and communications facilities, and standardized weapons and equipment. Arms and equipment have flowed almost continuously across the border since 1949. Many weapons now considered standard in the North Vietnamese Army are of Soviet origin, supplied, however, by the Chinese. Other items are of Chinese Communist manufacture.

Recent evidence indicates that this flow has provided generally adequate stocks of conventional equipment. Hanoi's own arms and ammunition production capability is limited, and it produces only limited quantities of mortars, bazookas, grenades, mines, and small arms and

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SELECTED NORTH-VIETNAMESE GROUND FORCES EQUIPMENT

Small Arms	
7.62-mm. pistol	USSR (Chinese copy)
7.62-mm. carbine (SKS)	USSR (Chinese copy)
7.62-mm. assault rifle (AK-47)	USSR (Chinese copy)
7.62-mm. light machine gun (RPD)	USSR (Chinese copy)
7.62-mm. heavy machine gun (Goryunov)	USSR (Chinese copy)
12.7-mm. heavy machine gun (DShK)	USSR (Chinese copy)
Artillery	
57-mm. antitank gun	USSR
75-mm. pack howitzer (M1A1)*	US
76.2-mm. gun (ZIS-3)*	USSR
105-mm. howitzer (M2)	US
122-mm. howitzer	USSR (Chinese copy)
Antiaircraft Artillery	
37-mm. gun, light	USSR
88-mm. gun (M37)*	Germany
85-mm. gun (probably)	USSR
100-mm. gun (KS-19) (probably)	USSR
Mortars	
60-mm.*	China
82-mm.	USSR (Chinese copy)
120-mm.	USSR (Chinese copy)
Rockets and Recoilless Weapons	
2.56- and 3.5-inch rocket launchers*	US
57-mm. recoilless rifle	US (Chinese copy)
75-mm. recoilless rifle	US (Chinese copy)
90-mm. rocket launcher (Type 51)	China
Armor	
PT-76 tank, amphibious	USSR
BTR-40 armored personnel carrier	USSR
Assorted half-tracks and light scout cars	
T-34 tanks (reportedly)	USSR
SU-76 assault guns	USSR
Motor Transport	
Truck GAZ-51, 4x2	USSR (The North
Truck GAZ-63, 4x4	USSR Vietnamese
Truck GAZ-67B, 4x4	USSR Army has an
Truck ZIS-151, 6x6	USSR estimated
Truck GAZ 69 & 69A, 4x4	USSR 3,000
Truck GAZ 46, amphibious, 4x4	USSR vehicles
Truck ZIL-485, amphibious, 6x6	USSR of all types)
Signal Equipment	
702 Handi-talkie	Chinese
718 Walkie-talkie	Chinese
102E	Chinese
103	Chinese

\* (limited quantities)



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ammunition. It does have a capability for arms repair, however.

While the over-all program for standardization of equipment has been quite successful, weak areas remain. The most notable inadequacies are in heavy ordnance equipment such as artillery and armor, and these will be the weaknesses most difficult to remedy. Lacking an industrial base, Hanoi must continue to depend on outside sources for major items of equipment.

Militia and Trained Reserve

Backing up the People's Army is a 500,000-man militia or trained reserve. Only the elements of the militia considered politically reliable are armed. The balance of this force is used for local security missions or as informants. The entire force, organized on a provincial basis, undergoes two weeks' training each year.

The militia is apparently intended to be the hard core of the trained reserves. It is to be built up through a conscription program begun in earnest in 1959 after several years of experiments. Yearly call-up varies according to national and local needs. Men between the ages of 18 and 25 are subject to two years' service in the armed forces, while those between 26 and 45 serve an unspecified length of time in the reserves. The recent increased



PT-76 amphibious tank

emphasis on this reserve force reflects the regime's desire to maintain a modern army.

Training

General Giap had early realized that improved training was essential in developing a modern army. A complete military school system was instituted after 1957 and a separate General Training Directorate on a level with the General Staff was established in 1958. Although instruction in guerrilla warfare techniques--a North Vietnamese speciality since 1945--is not neglected, conventional warfare training is stressed. Emphasis is placed on infiltration, camouflage, marksmanship, and field fortifications.

This formal training is supplemented by the combat training available in both Laos and South Vietnam. It is probable that Hanoi rotates as many personnel as is feasible into Laos to take advantage of this

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experience. North Vietnam's military school system, as well as its training philosophy, rests heavily on Chinese Communist foundations. The number of Chinese advisers at Vietnamese military schools is not known, but the tightening relationship between China and North Vietnam makes it certain that Chinese influence will remain high.

The Air Force

Although North Vietnam has no combat aircraft at the moment, the foundations for the creation of an air arm have been laid. The 1954 Geneva accords had specified "combat aircraft, jet engines and jet weapons" in the long list of forbidden military equipment. While Hanoi did not hesitate to ignore the accords in building up its ground force, it apparently felt that there was not the same immediate need to create an air force in blatant contravention of the accords. Future acquisition of an air capability, however, has been made easy by the foundation established in administration, logistics, transport, and air defense.

The air command and administrative organ of the PAVN started out as a small Air Studies Bureau of the General Staff. Its primary functions were pilot training, air base restoration and maintenance, and long-term development studies.

One of the early tasks of the fledgling air staff was airfield construction and improvement. A large number of sites had been inherited from the French, but most of them were overgrown or abandoned. Only 20 airfields with landing strips longer than 2,000 feet were serviceable and only five of these are considered capable of supporting even limited jet aircraft operations.

In the past few years, extensive improvements have been made on at least 10, and perhaps as many as 20, airfields. At least three new airfields have been built, including one--at Phuc Yen, about 30 miles northwest of Hanoi--with a concrete runway over 8,500 feet long. Although this field is probably intended to serve as an international air terminal, it could also handle modern high-performance combat aircraft.

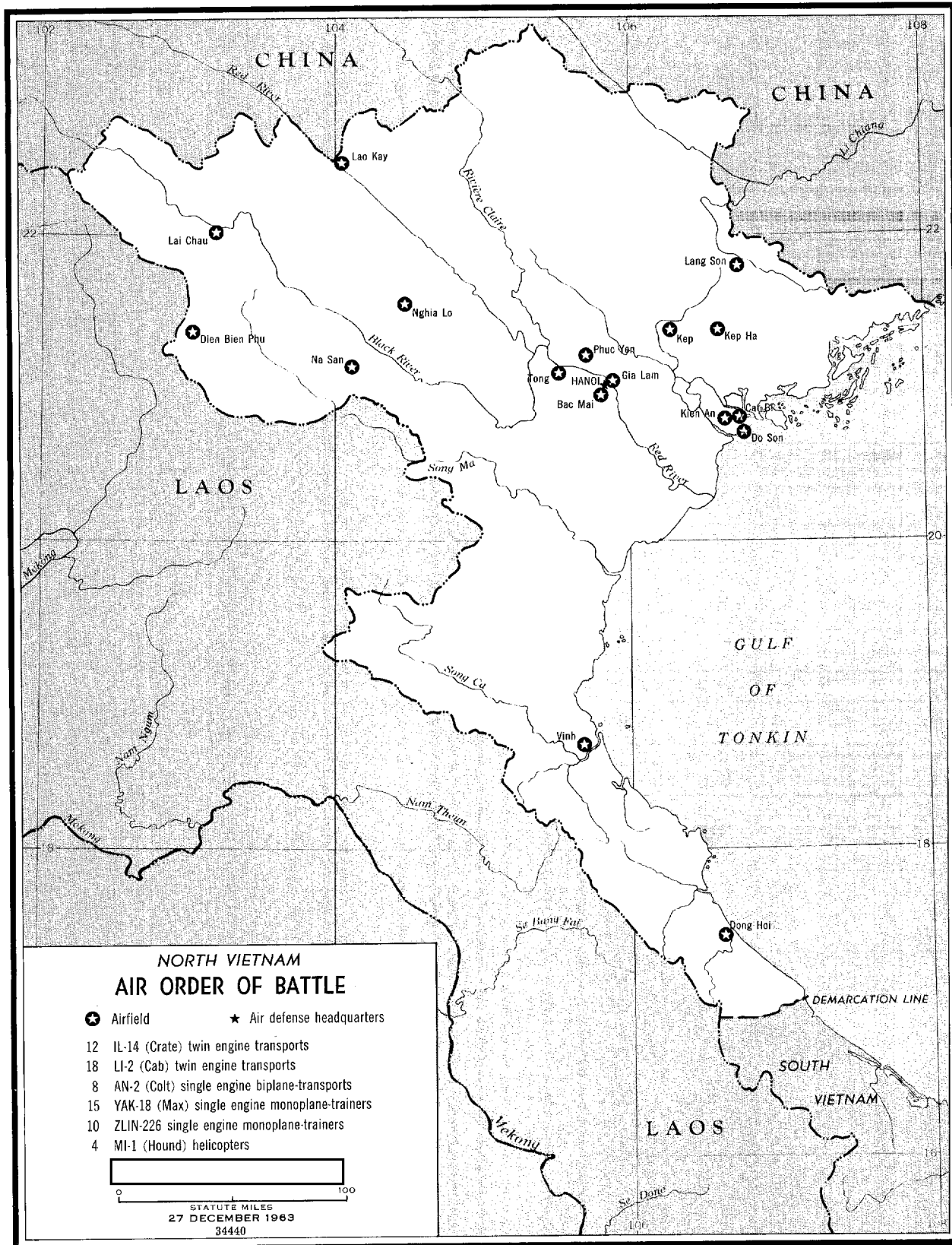


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The air arm derived a new impetus from the Soviet airlift into Laos which began in late 1960 and extended through October

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1962. Soviet aircraft staging out of North Vietnamese fields required sophisticated support in order to get heavy payloads off the ground. This support was given, with Soviet and Chinese help, in the form of strengthened runways, loading and unloading facilities, POL and cargo storage areas, and maintenance facilities.

When the Soviets withdrew from the Laos air supply operation, they left most of their equipment behind. The transport aircraft included in this equipment more than doubled the PAVN aircraft inventory.

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Without tactical aircraft, however, only a limited reaction is possible. The only active air defense capability is light (37-mm.) and medium (85- and 88-mm.) antiaircraft artillery. The medium AAA is used to defend urban centers, industrial complexes, and airfields. Approximately 40 medium AAA sites--generally with eight guns each--have been identified throughout the country.

The expansion of the South Vietnamese Air Force has contributed to North Vietnam's sensitivity about its air defense capability. Today North Vietnam would be extremely vulnerable to an air attack. As the early warning air defense system grows in sophistication and the airfield

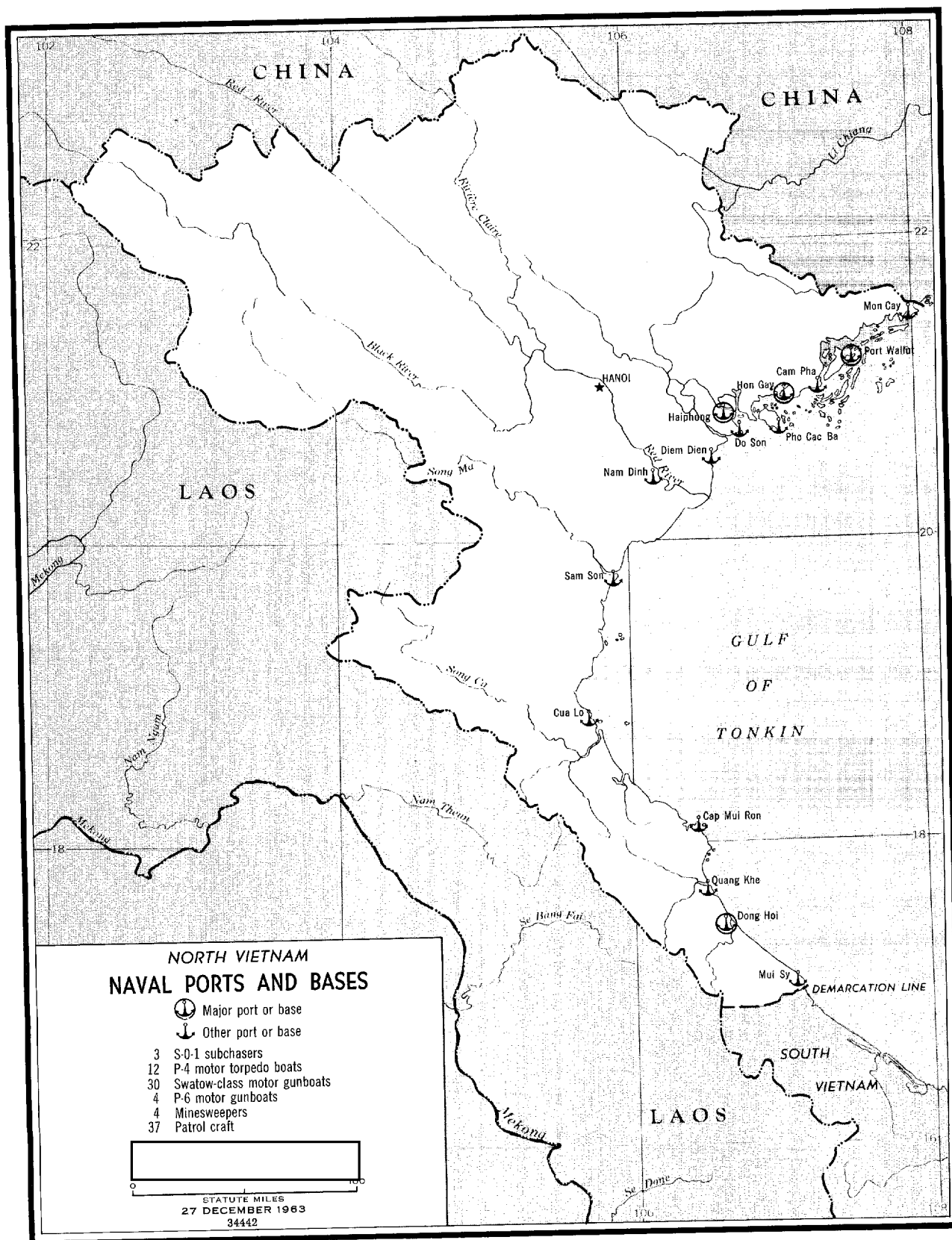
Air Defense

North Vietnam's Air Defense Command is directly under the General Staff on the same level as the air and naval entities. It is divided into two elements--air warning and antiaircraft artillery.

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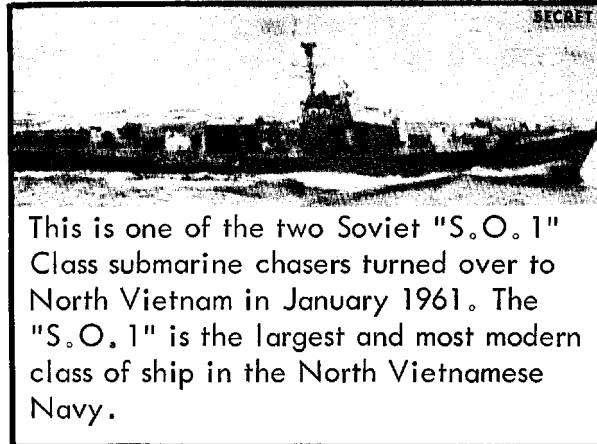
improvement program shows results, Hanoi may attempt to acquire fighter aircraft or surface-to-air missiles. Until then, some reliance, in the event of an attack, might be put upon the Chinese Communist fighter capability operating out of airfields close to the North Vietnamese border.

### The Navy

The groundwork for North Vietnam's navy was laid in 1955 with the establishment of the General Directorate of Coastal Defense. It is still primarily a coastal defense force, with no real deepwater capability. Its principal equipment is 30 Chinese Communist Swatow-class motor gunboats and 12 Soviet motor torpedo boats. The navy guards against smuggling and illegal entry or exit, conducts some minelaying, and participates in the transport of small clandestine forces.

Naval forces have not figured very prominently in Hanoi-supported guerrilla wars. The navy does have a capability, however, to counter attempted landings of small special-force teams and it has been used to run guns and supplies to the Viet Cong. Although naval capabilities are limited by the small number of vessels and their modest seagoing characteristics, minor offensive action could be undertaken in the form of surprise torpedo boat attacks.

The navy will undoubtedly remain a minor element in Hanoi's military strength. It is completely dependent on the Communist bloc for all arms and equipment. Local shipyards are not



This is one of the two Soviet "S.O. 1" Class submarine chasers turned over to North Vietnam in January 1961. The "S.O. 1" is the largest and most modern class of ship in the North Vietnamese Navy.

expected to produce anything larger than district patrol craft for the foreseeable future.

### The Future

The size of Hanoi's ground forces has been relatively static for the past several years and no large expansion is expected. Further improvements in the army's capability for unconventional warfare is doubtless in prospect. The recent reorganization of several divisions into a brigade structure--a move which gives the army greater flexibility and mobility--perhaps points the direction for future organization. Further improvements in weapons, logistics, and facilities can also be expected.

The largest growth will undoubtedly take place in the air defense organization. Acquisition of fighter aircraft is likely. In addition, if South Vietnam's air capability continues to grow, Hanoi may make serious attempts to acquire surface-to-air missiles.

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