We end the 125th anniversary section with this thoughtful article by the father of Airland Battle doctrine. We are but a few steps into the 21st century, but it appears that it may one day be characterized as the "counterinsurgency century."

Welcome to the Counterinsurgency Century

by retired GEN Donn Starry

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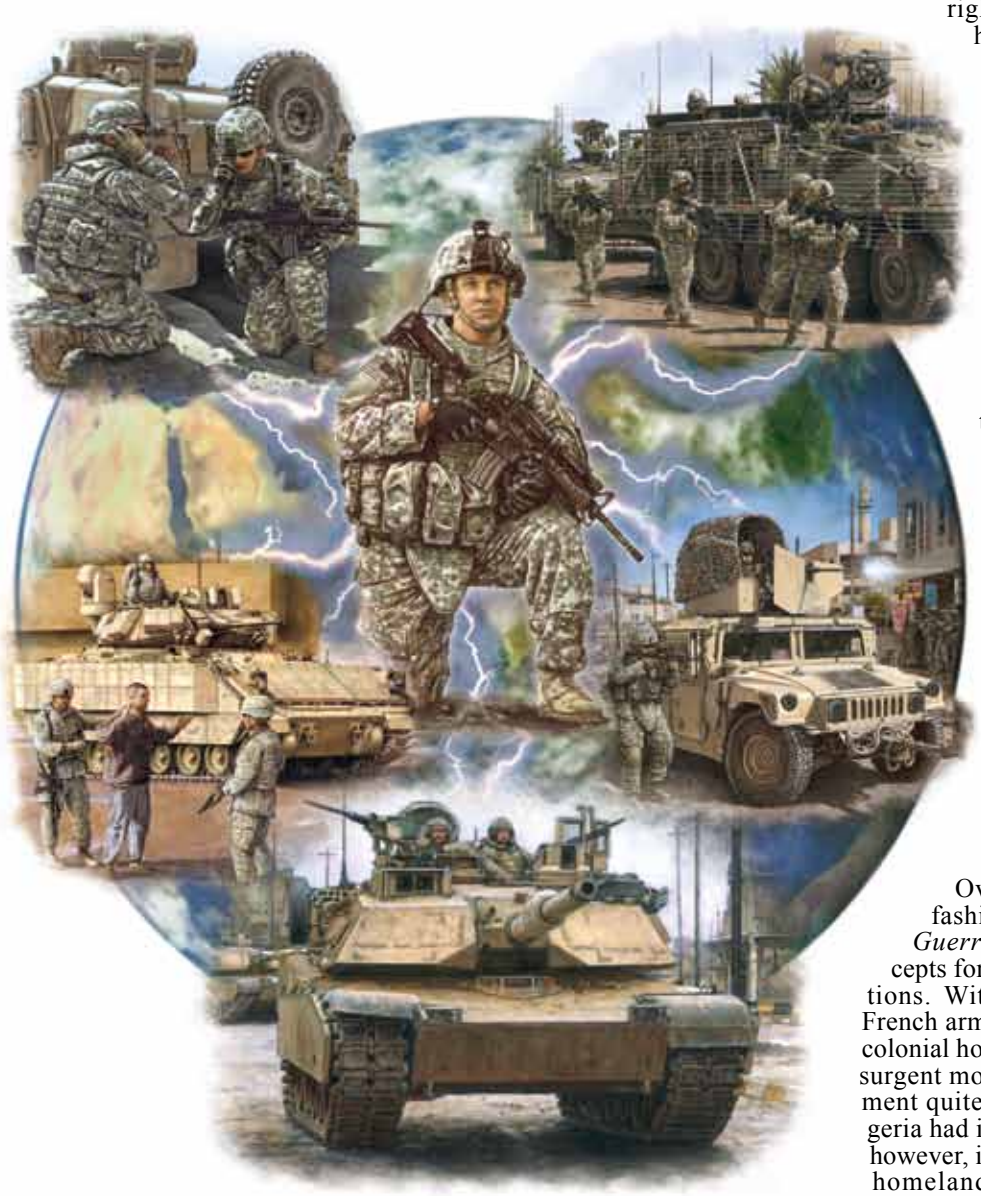
The 21st Century, even in its infancy, is obviously quite complex — perhaps even far more complex than the worlds of the 19th and 20th centuries, both of which were characterized by warfare, largely between nation states, in conflicts resulting in frightening losses in human resources as well as other national treasure. Indeed, the loss was of entire nation states as well as the catastrophic devastation of others — even those said to have "won" the war.

To illustrate the complexity thesis, consider the French experience post-1939-1945, as Japanese forces withdrew and the French attempted to re-establish control over their territorial holdings in what was once called "French Indochina." It was here that the French army was confronted by a considerable and well-developed Communist underground who aimed to spread Communist governance into Indochina, thus beginning counterinsurgent warfare against the Viet Minh.



French army forces deployed to Indochina were far too few and not adequately equipped to accomplish their assigned mission. Recognition of those inadequacies caused French army commanders on the ground to petition the home government for more units, weapons capabilities and support to match. Their petitions were largely ignored or outright denied. The best and most relevant histories of this period are set forth in Bernard Fall's books, ***Street without Joy*** and ***Hell in a Very Small Place***. Both have been extensively read by those attempting to characterize counterinsurgency warfare in Vietnam, as they represent preludes to what took place after the Geneva Accords were signed in 1954 and, at the time, at least token U.S. involvements in Vietnam began.

Surrendering at Dien Bien Phu, the French army leadership considered the rug pulled from beneath them by their political masters, who, from the soldiers' viewpoint, had neither tried to understand the situation nor respond to the entreaties of on-site commanders for help. The army literally withdrew into seclusion in army schools and colleges to begin the construct of a relevant counterinsurgency doctrine at strategic, operational and tactical levels in an attempt to determine what they should have done strategically, operationally and tactically; what had gone wrong; and how they might have done better.

Over the next few difficult years, they fashioned an operational concept titled *La Guerre Revolutionaire*, which included concepts for strategy, campaign and tactical operations. With its new operational concept, the French army went to war once again in a French colonial holding where there was a mounting insurgent movement. It was, however, an involvement quite different from that in Indochina. Algeria had in fact been a French colonial holding; however, it was to most French people part of the homeland — metropolitan France. It was

acceptable to give up some colonial involvements, but never the metropole. GEN Paul Aussaresses, in ***The Battle of the Casbah***, provides a striking account of what happened as *la Guerre* doctrine went to counterinsurgency war.

The campaign ended in 1962 when the French government under GEN Charles de Gaulle signed an agreement with the National Liberation Front granting Algeria independence from France. France thereby gave up a vast colonial holding in North Africa: nearly 1 million French citizens were forced to abandon their possessions and flee; there was admission to the deaths of nearly 30,000 French citizens; and perhaps as many as half a million Algerians died. Once again, French military leaders considered the rug pulled from beneath them by political masters, the senior of whom was this time one of their own. History had been provided a counterinsurgency situation considerably more complex than had been prepared for, despite the fact that French military doctrine in support of national goals had been drawn from the French army's own bitter experience in Indochina.

It is not at all difficult to transfer from the French experience in Indochina to that of U.S. forces in Vietnam. Once the November 1968 U.S. elections made clear that there would be a Republican in the White House in 1969, it was also clear that there would soon be a move made to redeploy U.S. forces from Vietnam. Further, it was anticipated in Saigon that by some official means redeployment would be ordered soon after the 1969 installation of the new government. This particular directive arrived in the form of National Security Study Memorandum 36 in April 1969.

The commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam, GEN Creighton Abrams, had already assembled a very small group of officers and enlisted and begun planning for the inevitable. The redeployment was called "Vietnamization." There were public pronouncements that U.S. forces would turn over conduct of the war to the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. Further, it was announced that funds would be made available to provide RVNAF with capabilities which were insufficiently robust in its existing forces to support its force structure. In the main that meant fire-support means — artillery and air, and logistics support of all kinds. Funds were appropriated by the U.S. Congress earmarked for that support. GEN Abrams' instructions were quite clear: "We have been directed to do this. There is considerable pressure from Washington to just cut and run. We must therefore very carefully examine the situation — the enemy's and our own, and propose redeployments that do not jeopardize the Vietnamese army's ability to continue successful combat operations against regular North Vietnamese Army forces attempting to infiltrate into South Vietnam, and infiltrations to support the remaining Viet Cong infrastructure in the south."

The first redeployment increment of 25,000 troops departed Vietnam in Summer 1969. Subsequent increments for redeployment were planned beginning in late 1969, all pursuant to GEN Abrams' guidance. However, two significant obstacles were thrown into the works by directives from Washington.

First, GEN Abrams and his planners had developed a plan to redeploy by unit rather than by individual. Despite brisk exchanges of traffic on the matter, GEN William Westmoreland, U.S. Army chief of staff, overrode GEN Abrams and redeployment was to be done by individual. GEN Westmoreland's decision meant that once redeployment began, there would be a constant readjustment in Vietnam to fill the ranks of units, still in-country and fighting, and replace the long-tenure people in those units who had been redeployed as individuals. The inevitable result was an on-station army in Vietnam considerably less combat ready than it had been and needed to be.

Secondly, as redeployment progressed, the U.S. Congress reneged and withdrew appropriations programmed to provide adequate fire support, transportation and logistics support to the RVNAF once U.S forces were redeployed. Many military members and others serving in Vietnam when this happened were, and remain, convinced that had the United States lived up to its commitment, the RVNAF could quite likely have won the fight against the NVA intrusion from the north. It was that close. A better description is to be found in Lewis Sorley's excellent book about GEN Abrams, ***A Better War***.

One recurring conclusion from the examples cited above, along with many others, is that military forces can perhaps no longer cope with more than part of war. Many counterinsurgency requirements stem from political, social, demographic, religious and other situations not directly resolvable by military operations. At the outset, then, there should be serious consideration of precisely what is being attempted, what capabilities are required (what are we trying to do), and how might the total capabilities of the nation be assembled to achieve whatever desired outcome has been decided on. However, if one then looks to departments of a federal government for help and finds employees who refuse to serve in an expeditionary environment, then what?

A French Foreign Legionnaire goes to war along the dry rib of a rice paddy between Haiphong and Hanoi. Behind the Legionnaire is a U.S.-gifted tank. *(Defense Department photo circa 1954)*

French troops man barricades in Algiers, Algeria, during France's war with its former colonial holding. The insurgency drove France to agree to grant Algeria its independence. *(ECPAD France)*

GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower, during his time as president, created an undertaking titled Project Solarium. It was an attempt to focus the U.S. government executive branch's resources on a select agenda of likely situations with which the president could be confronted and postulate coordinated solutions to those situations. If, however, the nation's leaders consider that its military forces are the only resource available for deployment — in a counterinsurgency or any other situation demanding action on the United States' part — then there must be a defining statement in the national-security strategy that stipulates this fact. It is only out of defining statements that force structure, manpower and equipment capability-requirements statements — prescribing the size, shape and equipping of the nation's armed forces — can materialize.

The examples cited above also represent involvement of officials in national political infrastructures in the conduct of military operations in the field, which those political entities had directed be undertaken at the outset. Some who have suffered the effects of those intrusions would call it "meddling." And so it is; unfortunately, it may continue to be. Indeed, the increasing complexity of counterinsurgency operations quite likely invites that type of intervention. In the United States, the tendency to attempt to direct operations of a deployed military force in the field from Washington offices has been a serious problem since the Spanish-American War. The problem has been aggravated by the growing ability to almost instantly move information in considerable volume from places far distant from one another to far more people than truly have a "need to know."

Advances in information technology have created an information glut that defies description as well as inhibits intelligent decisions based on analysis of available information. There is more information available than can be digested in a reasonable amount of time, enabling a decision that is relevant to the situation. In other words, there is not time to sort out and think about what all that information conveys. Further, the media — print as well as video — now has a parallel information glut to that in "official" channels. There is "investigative reporting" by people who are neither qualified "investigators" nor good reporters.

A hand goes up in the back of the room! "Is the peacekeeping function considered a mission for counterinsurgency forces? If so, is doctrine for such operations to be found in an appropriate field manual, or elsewhere?"

Several fairly recent events prompt such questions. Most dramatic, although now a matter of tragic but nearly "ancient" history, is the United Nations' assistance mission that deployed to Rwanda in 1993 and 1994 to referee the confrontation between the Tutsi and Hutu. The force commander was Canadian Forces LTG Romeo Dallaire, a brilliant, brave and concerned soldier with an impossible mission. In a long-overdue book, ***Shake Hands With the Devil***, LTG Dallaire recounts his experiences, his reports to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, his requests for more forces (all denied), the tragic deaths of 15 of his soldiers (four officers and 11 enlisted) and the tragic deaths of nearly 800,000 natives in the massacre that ensued. The United Nations failed; humanity failed.

As U.S. forces concluded redeployment from Vietnam, the obvious question became, "What to get ready for next?" Several considerations made answering the question much more difficult than necessary. First was the early decision not to mobilize Reserve Component units for Vietnam. Army Chief of Staff GEN Harold K. Johnson frequently recounted that he had gone to the White House seeking presidential approval to mobilize, only to be rebuffed by President Lyndon B. Johnson some five times on the basis that mobilization would threaten LBJ's Great Society program; therefore, it was not an acceptable course of action.

The Army then simply created three new divisional structures, then filled them with a combination of draftees and cadre from existing units. Absent mobilization, the authorized endstrength was then considered inadequate to support a one-year tour for those deployed to Vietnam. So the entire Army — continental United States-based units as well as those located in Europe, Korea and elsewhere — became the rotation base for Vietnam. This resulted in unit turbulence rates well beyond any threshold necessary to achieve and sustain readiness.

Especially hard hit was the noncommissioned officer corps — NCOs stationed in Europe could leave families there, deploy to Vietnam and return after a year, only to find themselves back in Vietnam again in about 18 months. On an average, this occurred three times, and the NCO would

retire, divorce or both. Most unit NCO academies shut down for lack of students as well as cadre. Morale was rock-bottom; military jails were full to overflowing; and equipment readiness rates were seldom above the 50-percent level due to lack of parts, mechanics and trained crews. Units deployed to North Atlantic Treaty Organization Europe did not believe themselves capable of successfully defending against an attack by Group Soviet Forces Germany, let alone capable of "winning" against such an attack.

On the other side of the inner-German border, it was apparent that the Soviets understood what was happening in U.S. Army Europe and elected to take advantage of the situation. In the roughly 10 years we concentrated almost solely on Vietnam, GSFG fielded new operational-level doctrine. The new doctrine, "mass, momentum and continuous land combat," featured reorganization of heavy units, fielding of 2 ½ generations of new tanks, seven new field artillery systems (six of them nuclear-capable), other technically improved equipment and shorter timelines for follow-on echelons to move forward to reinforce the first echelon fight. It was a new force; it obviously cost them dearly. GSFG exercise data revealed that they intended to concentrate on the northernmost three of NATO's deployed corps. Two of those corps were not deployed; one was only partially deployed. It appeared that they hoped to bring down those corps before the 16 NATO nations could reach a nuclear decision, and do so with conventional weapons. But if NATO did give a "yes" to nuclear employment, GSFG was ready to go nuclear at the tactical and operational levels of war. It was quite clear that the threat from GSFG was much more urgent than anyone could remember, making resuscitation of U.S. forces, especially Army forces in Europe, a first-order requirement.

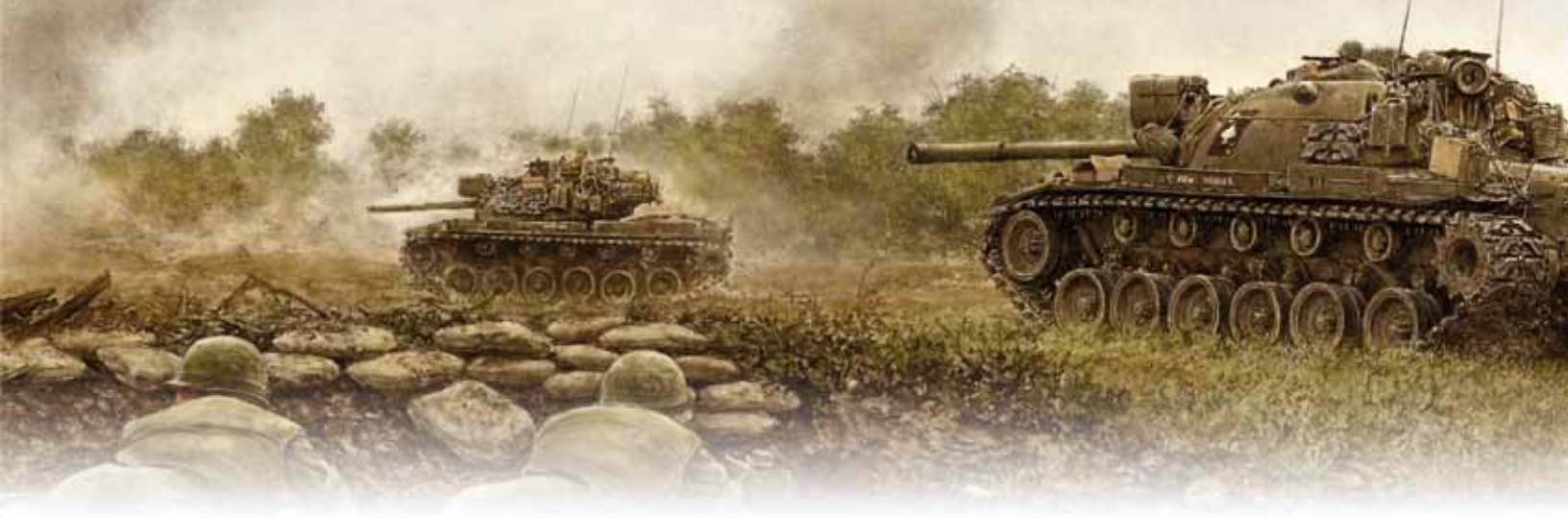
On the other side of the coin was the U.S. Army's traditional practice after every war of getting ready to fight it over again, only better. This line of reasoning led to a need to determine what we had learned in Vietnam and develop revised doctrine, new force structure and manpower requirements, and new equipment requirements, all for fighting the counterinsurgency war as well as the war against NVA regulars like those we had just left behind in Vietnam.

One of GEN Abrams' first challenges as chief of staff — having redeployed from Vietnam early in 1972 and been confirmed as Army chief of staff later that year — was to resolve the issue of "back to Europe first" vs. the pressing need for counterinsurgency doctrine. The best advice was while we did know a lot about counterinsurgency, we had not yet digested what we knew to the point from which we were ready to write doctrine and spell out equipment requirements, organizations and related requirements; hence, the decision to fix the U.S. Army in Europe first. Reflecting that decision, the Army returned to its pre-Vietnam 16-division structure, but with a manpower base of more than 200,000 soldiers smaller than the pre-Vietnam 16-division Army. Manpower of course is money, and the best advice seemed to be to take what could be had and ask for more as time and circumstances allowed. So it is that the 2008 Army does need greater endstrength, and that need is a holdover from the post-Vietnam decision to return to 16 divisions but without trying to settle the endstrength problem at the same time. Relative to that was the decision not to seek renewal of the draft law, which expired the end of July 1973. We knew we would be short endstrength, but we had no experience as to how many volunteers we could recruit. Today's Army lives in the shadow of those long-ago decisions.

It is necessary to remember that as the Army redeployed from Vietnam, while there were many problems, two demanded immediate resolution. One was the rather dismal condition of U.S. Army units deployed and on station in NATO Europe, as described earlier. Second was the advent of a volunteer Army reflecting the decision not to seek extension of the draft law, which expired in July 1973. Given the decision to reconstitute a credible U.S. Army in NATO Europe, that requirement became the focus of doctrine, equipment, force structure, organization development and fielding for nearly 17 years from 1973 to 1990.

For the Army that went to war during Operation Desert Shield/Storm, and performed so very well, was the product of two doctrinal evolutions that characterized those busy years: Active Defense (circa 1976) and AirLand Battle (circa 1982). Desert Shield cum Desert Storm were together the field test of all elements of that doctrinal evolution. And while not all of it worked precisely as its authors had intended, whatever shortcomings there may have been were overcome by the synergy of sound tactics, well-trained soldiers and well-led units. As a general rule, really good work is not done overnight.

U.S. UH-1D Huey helicopter picks up U.S. troops in Vietnam in 1966.



Finally, some relevant observations about mechanized (armored) forces in counterinsurgency operations are appropriate. In Vietnam, for example, both French and U.S. forces employed a varied assortment of armor(ed) equipment and units. The story commences with armor in Vietnam in the years immediately following the 1939-1945 war. The French, attempting to re-establish their pre-war colonial hold in French Indochina from 1945 to 1954, when French forces surrendered at Dien Bien Phu, experienced a generally unsatisfactory experience with mechanized forces, all equipped with 1939-1945 war-vintage equipment.

Observing the French experience, U.S. Army planners in Washington were convinced that armored forces could not operate successfully in Vietnam. There was considerable misunderstanding concerning the monsoon climate, jungle, mountains, rice paddies, weather and the Mekong Delta — not to mention the enemy in all those venues. As a result, when U.S. forces, primarily infantry, deployed to Vietnam in the early 1960s, infantry units deployed without their organic tank or armored cavalry battalions or squadrons; once there, they realized they needed their mechanized components and sent back to have them deployed after the fact.

At the same time, however, considerable investment was underway to create an armored command for the RVNAF, including necessary equipment, and a cadre of U.S. advisers. On balance, it was a quite successful effort. Forthcoming from the Naval Institute Press is a scheduled publication of a full-up history of the RVNAF armor command titled ***Steel and Blood***. Written by COL Ha Mai Viet, a distinguished member of that command, it is a well-written, authoritative account of RVNAF armor-command operations against insurgents as well as regular NVA forces.

However, it was not until 1967 that the report of the Mechanized and Armor Combat Operations in Vietnam study group, led by MG Arthur L. West Jr. — chartered by GEN Abrams, then the serving vice chief of staff of the Army — reported that after several months of in-theater evaluation, armor units were very effective in a counterinsurgency environment. Further, said the study group, the most cost-effective force in the field during all kinds of operations in Vietnam was armored cavalry, best represented by 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (Blackhorse). Thus, after eight years of fighting over terrain considered impassable to tanks and other armored vehicles; where climate and weather were said to severely inhibit armored-vehicle movement; where fighting an elusive enemy whose tactics put armored forces at considerable disadvantage, the mechanized force — especially armored cavalry — stood front and center not only in close combat but in pacification and security as well. In 1969, that evidence led GEN Abrams' redeployment planners to hold off redeployment of armor and mechanized units until the very last.

The remnants of war most often leave behind invaluable lessons to be deciphered and applied in an effort not to repeat the same mistakes. In the case of the aforementioned examples, two undeniable lessons were at least taught: in all categories of operations required of U.S. forces in Vietnam, armored units represented, more than any other force and by wide measure, more firepower and mobility for the least manpower exposure; and especially evident in the Cambodian incursion of 1970, when NVA regular units faced U.S. armor units — especially the Blackhorse — the mobility, firepower and combined-arms capability of the attacking armor force inevitably caused NVA commanders to order their troops to break and run. Herein lies the very important question: Were those lessons well learned, or were they not?

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Acronym Quick-Scan

GFSG — Group Soviet Forces Germany
MACV — Military Assistance Command-Vietnam
NATO — North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO — noncommissioned officer
NVA — North Vietnamese Army
RVNAF — Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces