



**Essay on the Potential Research Value of the
Operations Analysis (OPSANAL) System Files**
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[Curt Campbell prepared the following essay in July 1996 and staff made minor updates to it in January 2012. Some of the information may be out of date, some of the series or data files may go by different titles, and/or records may have been reallocated to different record groups. Researchers may wish to consult NARA's description catalog or other recent finding aids for more current information.]

This report will briefly outline how researchers can more effectively use the Operations Analysis (OPSANAL) system files.

Related Electronic Records (Selected)

The potential research value of the OPSANAL system, as with most databases, should not be evaluated as an isolated information source, but incorporated with other data to which it can be linked. NARA is fortunate to have in its holdings a number of other data files which can potentially be linked to the OPSANAL system in order to conduct a broader base of research on many aspects of the war in Vietnam.

As an example of the possible interconnections between separate electronic data files, the TIRSA [Terrorist Incident Reporting System, 10/1967 – 2/1973] system could be linked with the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) to attempt to correlate the progress in the pacification program to incidents of terrorism within hamlets. In conjunction, the System for Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) Armed Forces (SEER), 1969-1971, and the Territorial Forces Activity Reporting System (TFARS) Files, 9/1972 – 4/1974, could be cross referenced with TIRSA to analyze South Vietnamese response to terrorist attacks.

The BASFA [Enemy Base Area File, 7/1/1967 - 6/1/1971] file may be linked to other data files related to the military operations in Cambodia including the Cambodian Friendly Units Files (FANK), 3/1970 – 2/1973, and the Cambodian Incidents File (KHMER).

The Vietnam era provides a view of the sharp contrast of modern society's tentative transition from a textual-based work environment to that embodying electronic form. Because of the software specific format of OPSANAL's NIPS [National Military Command System Information Processing System] system, the periodic variances between the provided system documentation and actual output, and the purpose-defined lack of deeper description, it is recommended that researchers use other archival sources, along with the electronic records, in order to better

comprehend the context of the records. Accordingly, wider interconnectivity can be established with the electronic records of the Vietnam War by examining traditional paper documents.

Related Military Textual Records (Selected)

The textual records of the Vietnam War can provide a wider understanding of the electronic records available. The Textual Archives Services Division [at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland] has an abundance of finding aids describing the holdings of military textual records which pertain to the Vietnam War. Of particular interest is Record Group 472 which consists of the records from Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). See the entry for Record Group 472, in the *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States* (1995). Record Group 472 has a detailed 37 volume finding aid for the use of researchers. The following record descriptions are but a sampling of those textual records which have direct intellectual or organizational links to their electronic counterparts held at NARA.

Volume 2 describes the Records of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, MACV (J-3), these include after action reports for the years 1965-1971, Southeast Asia ground operations weekly summaries for 1966-1970. These reports are the seed-bed of information which was input into the VNDBA [Vietnam Database, 1/1963 – 4/1971] system for analysis. Of additional note, many of these textual files contain photographs providing visual documentation of the situation reports.

The Records of the MACV Advisory Teams, after action reports for 1967-1972 in volume 6 can provide valuable corroborating evidence to VCIIA [Viet Cong Initiated Incidents Files, 1/1965 – 12/1968] and VNDBA records. Date of action, provincial location, UTM coordinates, and casualty data can provide interrelating links between the two record types.

The Textual Archives Services Division has a listing for Military Region 3, daily, weekly and monthly reports on terrorist activity. This is available in the CORDS MR3, Public Safety Division's reports in Volume 5 of the textual finding aids.

Volume 3, within the CORDS listings there are the Records of Civil Operations and Rural Development, Support Analysis Division containing such reports as "An Examination of the Viet Cong Reaction to the Vietnamese Strategic Hamlet Program (RM-4028-ARPA), July 1964," which can be directly tied to the BASFA records, those of TIRSA or HES.

The data for the VCIIA, VNDBA, and SITRA (Situation Report Army File) databases was brought in from OPREP-4 (brief narrative reports) and OPREP-5 (more detailed weekly summaries) textual reports submitted from operational units to MACV headquarters. If one wished to see the original source data from which these databases were formed one could look at the individual OPREP records themselves, or examine the textual Historical Information Management System (HIMS) on microfilm. The finding aid for these sources of information is MACVJ03, Volume 2.

Another valuable resource illustrating the utility of the OPSANAL system is the 12 volume *A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War: 1965-1972*. A periodic report published by the

Pentagon, it is available to researchers in the Electronic Records Research Room in College Park, Maryland. Of particular interest are Volume 3: Viet Cong - North Vietnamese Operations and Volume 4: Allied Ground and Naval Operations, which provide direct links and outputs from elements within the OPSANAL system which were used, however indirectly, for executive decision-making regarding the conduct of the war in Southeast Asia.

The Vietnam War is unique to American military culture in the fact that the military alone, without assistance from any other agency, provided the statistical and analytical seed-bed which exclusively influenced decision makers at the highest level of government. In accordance, research could be made examining early State Department studies conducted to investigate the viability of the war in Vietnam. It was the only time that relatively non-biased analysis was given, without the direct input of the Pentagon. On October 22, 1963 Thomas L. Hughes, Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research sent an intelligence analysis, RFE-90, titled "Statistics on the War Effort in South Vietnam Show Unfavorable Trends" to Secretary of State Dean Rusk. This started a heated exchange between the Pentagon and the State Department concerning jurisdiction of studies concerning the conflict in Southeast Asia. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara insisted that the State Department keep clear of analyzing the Vietnam situation as it was beyond their scope of responsibility. Rusk's reply makes clear that the State Department would acquiesce in the military's demand. This gave the Pentagon the overwhelming role in unilaterally producing such analyses, and denied top officials data and appraisals that might call the military's official position into question.

The complete text of the (RFE-90) report can be read in *United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, book 12, pages 579-589. This book, along with surrounding documentation, is available at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, in the Vice President's Security Files, Government Agencies, Department of State Intelligence Reports. The *Foreign Relations of the United States - Vietnam* volumes includes a detailed register of State Department communications dealing with the Vietnam War.