

History of the South Vietnamese Directorate General for Technical Security

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Editor's note: This article is an abridgement of a longer work written by [Redacted] in September 1975, which is available from the Center for Cryptologic History.

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(U) [Redacted]
[Redacted] The success of DGTS is the melody of a harmonious orchestra which plays the sounds of "combination," "contribution," and "devotion." The sounds of DGTS were so helpful to the field commanders, like the sound of music.

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(U) [Redacted]
[Redacted] By 1957, all French training missions had been withdrawn, and the U.S. Military Assistance and Advisory Group [MAAG] took over the task of training the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. After a few years, a sizeable number of Vietnamese officers and men were attending military schools in the United States or had been sent on orientation visits to American military installations.

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(U) U.S. training methods had just been introduced in the RVNAF. Curriculum and lesson plans, which placed heavy emphasis on special counterinsurgency and technical skills, were very carefully discussed and prepared for teaching at training centers and military schools. In recognition of the insurgent type of war and of the rising needs for more personnel trained in this specialty, intelligence training was taken from the former Security, Intelligence, and Psywar School, which was converted into a true intelligence school with many elements. Also, additional technical skills courses such as Basic Crypto Officer, Crypto Equipment, and Personnel Security, were opened for the needs of the RVNAF, which started to receive U.S. equipment. It was during these years that I foresaw the need for a high security compartmentation for sensitive units.

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(U) [Redacted]

(U) Starting with an ineffective *Dai Doi I Nghién Cúu Ky Thuát Truyén Tin* [1st Communications Technical Research Company] with eighty specialists and a small *Quan Khai Thac Ky Thuát Dac Biet* [Special Technical Exploitation Organization] with thirty-four persons, I built up in war a sophisticated branch, *Ngành An Ninh Ky Thuát Dac Biet* [The Special Security and Technical Branch, later named the Directorate General for Technical Security], with a strength of more than 3,000 people.

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(U) [Redacted]

[Redacted] It took a combination of leadership, training and staff, security and intelligence experiences, contributions from all DGTS's members and friends, and devotion from everyone to the hard work of the daily mission.

(U) With the best heartfelt feelings and thanks to all my officers, NCOs, enlisted men, and civilians who contributed to the buildup of the DGTS, and with my heartbreaking grief to see the DGTS collapse with most of its members left behind, I give my deep and sincere thanks to all DGTS members.

~~(S-CCO)~~ I also owe a debt of gratitude to the high-ranking officials and general officers from the U.S. government agencies (embassy, MAAG, MACV, DoD, DAO, CIA, NSA, ASA) who offered sympathy or moral recognition to the DGTS by their visits, their advice, and their support. [Redacted]

They were the best friends of the DGTS, having a common goal and serving the same spirit of freedom. They can be proud of their patience and courage, despite the difficulties and

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high risks during the somber days of the Vietnam War. The success earned by DGTS was due to their contribution.

(U) I dedicate this memoir to my respected parents, who always taught me the best and honest way to live and to serve.

(U) And I offer my hope for the future of my children, who always believed in the spirit of freedom and tried to improve their education.

(U) Finally, I wish to give my love to my patient wife, who accomplished quite well the P.H.T. [Push Husband Through] mission.

(U) In modern war, besides special security "need to know" clearances to see and exploit highly classified material, many other measures are taken to protect communications. One is COMSEC (communications security), monitoring friendly targets, trying to detect any command laziness, any machinery failure, or any clerical errors to establish COMSEC violations.

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[Redacted] This is technical intelligence composed of various fields: ELINT [electronic intelligence], RADINT [radar intelligence], PHOTINT [photographic intelligence], and COMINT [communications intelligence].

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(U) In Vietnam, technical intelligence and security activities were introduced in the first years of the 1960s.

(U) With the tools of memory, I try to reconstruct at least the soul of the events which gave birth to the DGTS, raised its life, and also caused its death. My purpose is to report as accurately as possible the corporate body of history that the memories form. The facts will be selected and disposed to mirror various points relative to joint activities of the Directorate General for Technical Security with other agencies.

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FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE ACTIVATION OF THE SSTB

(U) The activation of the Special Security and Technical Branch [SSTB], the forerunner of the DGTS, involved three factors:

- the communist insurgency;
- the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces organization;
- the technical alliance with the U.S. government.

A review of each factor is needed to understand the birth of the SSTB and the evolution and development of its components to become the Directorate General for Technical Security of the Republic of Vietnam.

The Communist Insurgency

(U) The signing of the Geneva Accords on 20 July 1954 ended the hostilities of the French-Vietnam Nationalist and Viet Minh War (1945-1954). At a provisional military demarcation line, the 17th parallel, Vietnam was then divided into two parts, the communist regime established in Hanoi with Ho Chi Minh as leader and the anticommunist government in Saigon under the leadership of former emperor Bao Dai, as chief of state, and prime minister Ngo Dinh Diem. On 26 October 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem declared South Vietnam a republic and became president of the first Republic of Vietnam.

(U) At that time, the North Vietnamese communists already had developed an organization able to engage in war both as a guerrilla force and a conventional army. According to the Geneva treaty, communist forces in South Vietnam had to be regrouped and evacuated to North Vietnam, but Ho Chi Minh left thousands of selected and skilled men and many caches of arms and equipment behind in central Vietnam and the Mekong Delta. Serving as a nucleus of subversive and military efforts to overthrow the new Republic of Vietnam, these communists were known as Viet Cong.

(U) The Viet Cong increased in strength in the last years of the 1950s by recruiting and expanding their bases throughout South Vietnam. Meanwhile, North Vietnam sent back to South Vietnam many South Vietnamese communists who had withdrawn in 1954.

(U) Hanoi's decision to switch from a political struggle to armed struggle was rapidly reflected in a rise of sabotage and terrorist attacks in South Vietnam during the second half of 1959. The National Liberation Front (NLF) for South Vietnam was founded on 20 December 1960, gaining 200,000 members within a year. The Provisional Liberation Government (PLG) was also formed to legitimize the ideals of the NLF. By 1962 the PLG had organized its forces into politico-military units: full- and part-time guerrillas and village guerrillas. These three forces intensified the campaign of communist aggression by increasing sabotage, terrorism, and armed attacks. Hanoi also infiltrated some regiments of the regular People's Army of North Vietnam. Flow of equipment through

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Hanoi increased, particularly large-caliber weapons provided by the international communist bloc (Soviet Union, China, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia), as well as Lebanon.

(U) In the meantime, internal political difficulties in the country's administration gave the Viet Cong opportunities to exploit. By late 1965, the Viet Cong controlled a large portion of the population in provinces and had been able to destroy hamlets and major roads. They also collected taxes at will.

(U) In summary, communist policy in Hanoi was to prosecute the war vigorously in the South. The strategy as defined by North Vietnam and the puppet NLF was to seek a political settlement favorable to the communists. The political objectives had to be achieved by phases, passing through "neutralism" and "coalition government" to total victory by force.

RVN Armed Forces

(U) The president acted as chief of state and commander in chief of the armed forces. He appointed and promoted general officers.

(U) The Ministry of Defense had an extensive staff organization through which it directed defense establishment policy. It theoretically controlled all aspects of military activities but was in fact mostly administrative. Directly subordinate to the Ministry of National Defense was the chief of the Joint General Staff. He had four deputies, respectively, for Plans and Operations, Regional and Popular Forces, Training, and Political Warfare. Direct channels operated between the JGS and field commands. The centralized chain of command extended from the chief of the Joint General Staff through the chief of staff to corps commander.

(U) There were four corps areas and a Capital Military Region - for purposes of command, administration, and logistics. These corps commanders were responsible for the conduct of security operations against the Viet Cong within their respective zones. The Reserve Forces (airborne division, ranger brigades, marine division) were allocated to corps by the chief of the Joint General Staff in accordance with the degree of intensity of Viet Cong insurgent activity in the corps areas.

(U) The Air Force was formed by five air divisions, a depot wing, an Air Force headquarters, and a training center. An air division included transport, helicopters, tactical and liaison wings and squadrons. Particularly, the 5th Air Division managed the 716th Squadron and the 718th Tactical Squadron, which provided the aircraft for ARDF [airborne radio direction finding] activity. The 716th and 718th Squadrons operated jointly with Unit 17 of the DGTS.

(U) J7 was under command of the chief of the Joint General Staff, but practically was under the staff supervision of the chief of staff.

The Technical Alliance with U.S. Agencies

(U) For almost thirty years, the United States was involved in the Vietnam War, beginning when American members of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] made parachute drops to Ho Chi Minh in 1945. But direct involvement with South Vietnam began in 1950 when U.S. diplomatic recognition was accorded the government of the state of Vietnam headed by former emperor Bao Dai.

(U) The communist threat from the North became a source of concern to the United States as well as to the Republic of Vietnam. South Vietnam was considered a front-line in the Free World's battle against communism. The fall of South Vietnam would cause the rapid extension of communist control or complete accommodation to communism in Southeast Asia. The strategic position of the United States, particularly in the Orient, would be seriously affected. In other words, under the "domino theory," the fast accommodation of many Asian countries to communism would damage U.S. prestige and might endanger stability and security in the Middle East and Europe.

(U) The Republic of Vietnam called on Allied countries in SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] to extend assistance for the maintenance of the Republic of Vietnam as a free and independent entity. This call was accepted by members of SEATO and shaped subsequent South Vietnam-United States relations.

(U) A joint statement was issued in mid-1957 by the two governments, United States and South Vietnam, affirming the common desire of the two nations for closer cooperation in working for South Vietnam's freedom and independence. They made mutual agreements and joint programs against communist subversive activities. The Republic of Vietnam received military aid and increased military efforts to obstruct and reduce the flow of men and materials from Hanoi to South Vietnam.

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(U) The Special Technical Exploitation Organization was deactivated. J7/JGS was activated on 1 February 1963 with more responsibilities and more independence in providing direct technical support to consumers without waiting for the chief of staff's decision. But the care of tactical operations was still maintained by field unit commanders.

(U) The 1st Communications Technical Research Company had the covername of "Unit 15" and was reorganized with a new TOE, more specialists and equipment. It was placed under the direct command and technical guidance and supervision of the chief of J7/JGS. The relationship of Unit 15 with the Telecommunications Command still existed but only for supply and maintenance for the common equipment.

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~~(S)~~ ~~(U)~~ As in COMSEC, the 1st Communications Control Company was upgraded and refitted during April and came under the command and technical supervision of Chief J7/JGS [Redacted]

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(U) It was during this period that successful technical support to field units became widely known by JGS and recognized by the Ministry of National Defense. Recruiting for more technicians was specially authorized by the chief of JGS. Also, the ministry issued a special decree (with restricted distribution) for activation of a new branch, the Special Security and Technical Branch, which determined J7/JGS as head of the branch and included all other components - Units 15 and 16 and ASTDs.

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(U) And final collapse of the DGTS occurred on 29 April 1975, the last day of the Republic of South Vietnam.

MISSION

The Directorate General for Technical Security

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(U) The chief of the JGS/J7 was the head of DGTS. The director general of DGTS, whose billet rank was major general, was appointed by the president of the RVN through the chief of the Joint General Staff and the minister for national defense. He was responsible for technical operations and support to the Republic of Vietnam. Other responsibilities concerned command of all units of the DGTS, recruitment and training of DGTS personnel, and care for good and harmonious functioning among DGTS's components.

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Unit 15

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Unit 17

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716th & 718th Technical Squadrons

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The DGTS Centers

(U) The DGTS had four centers for the appropriate corps, at Danang (I Corps), Pleiku (II Corps), Saigon (III Corps), and Can Tho (IV Corps). The commanding officer of the center was under the direct command of DGTS, but, as an attached unit, the center had to depend on its corps for installations, local discipline, and logistics. The commanding officer of the center supervised the technical activities of the ASTDs in the corps areas and made periodic visits to give staff guidance and technical support. The commanding officer also was the DGTS representative at corps staff. His mission was the most delicate, relating to

- coordinating with the corps headquarters (including the commanding generals, the chiefs of staff, the G2s) to learn their requirements in order to furnish technical requests to DGTS for approval or technical collection guidance;
- dealing with other components of the corps for making plans about the corps' special instructions or guidance (such as discipline, psywar, local training, and other activities);
- coordinating with G6 and local logistics commands for common equipment and supplies or maintenance;
- providing technical support to the corps.

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The ASTD

The ASTD was the lowest unit of the DGTS. It was a component of the division which was responsible for command and discipline and installation and logistics support (except special equipment provided by DGTS). Personnel promotion and assignment were DGTS's responsibility but were based mostly on proposals by division CGs through the corps.

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Unit 16

(U) Unit 16 was the DGTS unit responsible for COMSEC support to the RVN government agencies and to the RVNAF. Unit 16 was under command and technical guidance supervision of J7/JGS after April 1964. Before that, it was successively under command of and with support responsibilities to the Telecommunications Command, Signal Command, and J6/JGS.

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(U) Quarterly statistics on COMSEC violations were submitted to the chief of the General Staff for approval before dispatching them to the appropriate CG/corps, divisions, reserve forces, and other units.

(U) At corps and division level, COMSEC was taken care of by the COMSEC detachment and COMSEC mobile teams. Mobile teams moved along with the regiments or brigades and provided direct support in operations. The composition, exploitation and reporting system of those detachments were similar to U16 but with reduced strength.

(U) COMSEC was a very important but delicate mission. The DGTS had many difficulties in the first years in introducing the principles and the discipline of COMSEC to commanders (mostly general ranks) who committed violations by not using encoding regulations for their messages. COMSEC failures were exploited by the Viet Cong in mounting ambushes. The number of violations were gradually decreased, and the commanders learned that the DGTS served their own safety, and this meant security.

RECRUITING, TRAINING, SECURITY

Recruiting

(U) Vietnam was at war for many years. A military service obligation in wartime for all male citizens between eighteen and thirty-three years of age was prescribed after 1952. But the increased tempo of military action against the communists and the gradual need to expand the armed forces caused a military draft after 1965 for all male citizens between the ages of eighteen and thirty-seven.

(U) To meet personnel requirements, the DGTS had authorization to recruit and train new specialists. Sections S2 (Security), S8 (Plans), and S10 (training) of J7/JGS were responsible for contacting the Psychological Training Center and the Training Command, to make plans for the selection and processing of new recruits.

(U) The new recruit had to be mature and strong enough to work in the field but also had to have an average education and ability to receive technical training. He had to be a good citizen and belong to a good family whose members had never had contact or working relations with the communists.

(U) The new recruit was temporarily assigned to DGTS for a testing period (fewer than three months for checking security, ability to assimilate technology, and self-discipline and conduct). If the recruit checked out as fair, he would stay with DGTS; otherwise, he had to be reassigned to another unit by J1/JGS.

Training

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(U) Being a Special Branch with sensitive and secret activities, the DGTS had to perform specialized training by itself. Training consisted of many levels: basic, refresher, and advanced. It took different forms: classes, OJT, and field exercises. DGTS also sent students to the military schools or abroad. Since the DGTS did not have any formal school, the head of DGTS had to organize a "training area" with a very flexible solution, as follows.

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(U) During the week, the instructor had to give at least two short written interrogations. At the end of the week, the student had to answer a "few questions check." A monthly examination was given to the student. Student motivation was maintained by the commander's hands, the head of DGTS tours and inspections, through the weekly "encouragement or reprimand" policy, and with the night overtime work to grade.

(U) The DG/DGTS, the Commanding Officers of units and the instructors met often as a training committee to discuss the subjects and lesson plans with the purpose of improving the training.

Security

(U) The DGTS had its own security regulations which were applied to DGTS members as well as to those who had a "need to know" about DGTS activities or results. It also prescribed the protection of DGTS installations and materials.

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(U) A compartmentation system divided the personnel into different groups with different area responsibilities. The access from one division to another had to be authorized by the commanding officer of the unit.

(U) The Unit Pass, with photo, had to be worn once the individual was within in the unit. It had different designations - area of work, permanent worker, or temporary duty.

(U) Any guest who desired to visit DGTS units had to have a "need to know" clearance and approval from the head of DGTS. He was invited to wear a Special Pass during the visit. The DGTS customer also had to have the "need to know" clearance processing by the head of DGTS. He was invited to sign an oath relating to the protection of DGTS sources and materials. After release from the command post, he signed again - another form which ended his access to COMINT.

(U) A DGTS unit had to be protected by a metal fence. Field centers and ASTD installations were also reinforced by barbed wire. Strangers - personnel and transportation - were not authorized to go into the unit. A permanent armed guard system kept records of any "entry-sortie" activities.

(U) DGTS documents were usually "TOI MAT" (TOP SECRET), "MAT" (SECRET), and "KIN" (CONFIDENTIAL) - the lowest security degree, reserved for personnel and logistic matters.

(U) Each unit, center, and ASTD of DGTS had an officer who was in charge of security. This officer assisted the commanding officer in security matters. He kept contact with the S2/J7/JGS, who supervised the whole security operation within the DGTS. The S2/J7 kept updated files, made frequent visits to units and other DGTS components, maintained staff relations with the National Police and the MSS for file checking purposes. He also had contact with the Any security event or problem had to be reported on time to the DG/DGTS for immediate order or action.

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DGTS RELATIONS WITH OTHER NATIONAL AGENCIES

(U) The Director General/DGTS was a member of the *Uy Ban Phoi-hop Tinh Bao Quoc Gia* (National Intelligence Coordination Committee) led by the *Có Văn Tổng Thông Dac Trach An Ninh Tinh Bao* (President's Advisor for Security and Intelligence). The other members of this committee were the Commander of the National Police, the Director of the CIO, the Director of the Military Security Service, and the Chief of J2/JGS.

(U) With this function and responsibility, the DG/DGTS provided technical intelligence to the president's office and members of the NICC. He also provided COMSEC support to RVN government agencies (especially the Ministry of Interior interprovince net). The director of communications worked jointly with the DGTS in respect to this particular field.

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(U) A summary of political-diplomatic communications activities related to Vietnam released by communist broadcasts (Hanoi, NLF, Peking) and by the BBC was also distributed to the president's office, the CIO, the COS/JGS, the Chief JGS, and Chief of J2/JGS.

(U) The Military Security Service and the National Police also cooperated with the DGTS in counterintelligence operations. Some of these operations were successful.

(U) As in COMSEC, the DGTS worked closely with the J6/JGS and the Signal Service and also with the Director of Communications/Ministry of the Interior. The DGTS also had contact with the other components of the JGS (J3, J5, CLC, MP and JGS/Computer Center) pertaining to plans, operations, logistics, and security matters.

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(U) Although very secretive and very delicate, as usual by working hard and trying all the time to produce faster and more accurate intelligence, the DGTS finally gained prestige as an exemplary unit among others within the Republic of Vietnam government

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and the RVNAF. In the last few years, from 1970, letters of compliment, citations, and medals were awarded to DGTS personnel.

Relations with Foreign Agencies

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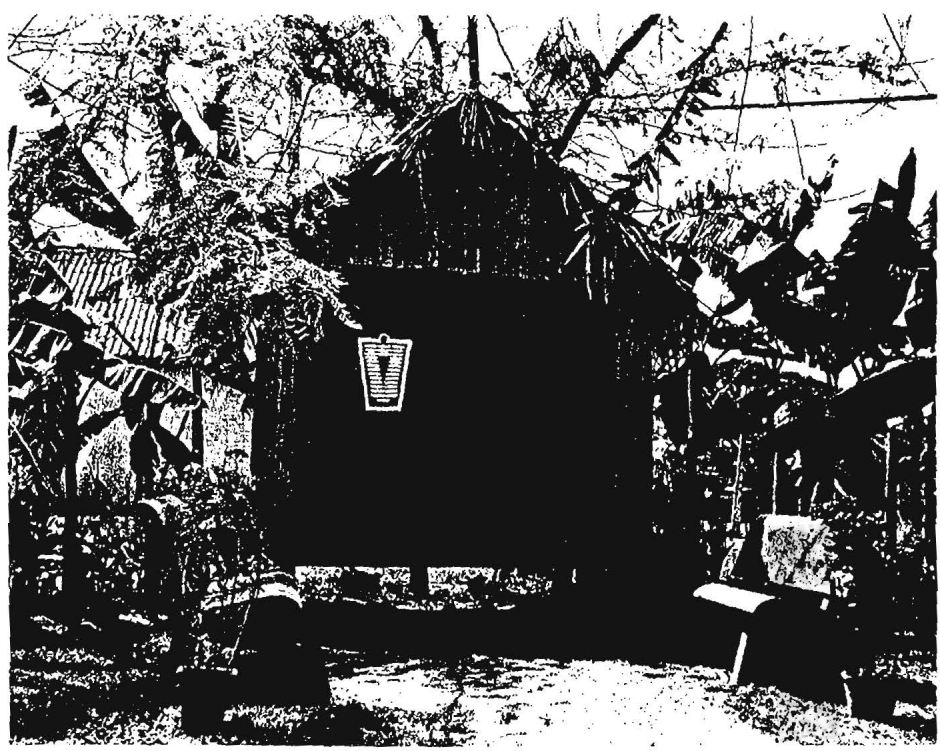
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Army Security Agency Shrine - Joint General Staff Area, Saigon

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(U) In sum, the U.S.-Vietnamese technical cooperation was excellent, due to frankness, good understanding, mutual respect and sincere friendship.

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CONCLUSION

(L) Thus was the birth, the life, and the death of the DGTS.

(L) Through this evolution, the 1st Communications Technical Research Company operated in 1963 with a nucleus of less than eighty specialists. In April 1975, the Directorate General for Technical Security's last strength was 2,594 persons, not including some 358 of the general forces' ASTDs and 300 new recruits. The size became thirty times larger within twelve years.

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(U) The DGTS's life was too short! But it did play an important role in the Vietnam War. Its activities never overlapped those of other intelligence agencies. Its collection responded to national goals. The military and political intelligence information provided by the DGTS contributed the most valuable data in the intelligence community. DGTS reports were always accurate, effective, and made productive contributions to overall intelligence analysis.

(U) DGTS's success was due to the contribution of its personnel and friends. Exhibiting many basic qualities, these men responded to good leadership and good technical training with determination and courage. They were accustomed to work hard, as were their cadres. They were realistic and flexible, human and highly devoted to the spirit of freedom.

(U) But the DGTS's destiny was unfortunate. South Vietnam succumbed to many politico-social problems, which brought along the death of DGTS. It was so sorrowful and tragic.

(U) Once again, with the hope that this short memoir will reflect the "sounds of contribution" and the "pride of accomplishment," may I pray for the DGTS members left behind.

(b) (1)

(FOUO) [redacted] former
brigadier general in the Republic of
Vietnam Armed Forces [redacted]

(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36
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