

# The Marine's Alternative

## A Vietnam Variant

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Pacification was an elusive goal during the American involvement in Vietnam. Many programs were attempted and, for the most part, failed. One program that was never really given a fair chance was the CAP program, and this article will provide the rules and background to allow players of VG's *Vietnam* game to try it.

In June of 1964, when General William Westmoreland took over as COMUSMACV, he immediately came into conflict with Marine Corps leaders concerning the proper way to conduct the war. Westmoreland favored the "search and destroy" strategy with large numbers of troops scouring the countryside, seeking to engage enemy troops whenever and wherever possible.

Seeing the Vietnamese people as the true objective, the Marine Corps instituted the Combined Action Platoon program (CAP). One U.S. rifle squad and a medic would be attached to a South Vietnamese Popular Forces platoon of 38 men to provide village security. The CAPs lived with the villagers, providing around-the-clock security from the VC.

The marines and PF's complemented each other. The marines supplied the technical know-how to direct supporting fire and the backbone to rally the PF's to stand and fight (typically, these troops fled at the first sign of VC). The PF's in turn eased the interaction between the Americans and villagers. And the villagers, confident that the CAPs would protect them, cooperated with the troops.

Westmoreland recognized the virtues of the CAPs, but did not encourage their use outside of I Corps. He complained, "I simply had not enough numbers to put a squad of Americans in every village." However, arithmetic does not bear this out. In 1967, South Vietnam had approximately 2,500 villages. To put a squad in every village would require forty thousand combat troops. It is important to remember, though, that every American combat soldier had about 8 persons whose job was to keep him supplied. A nationwide commitment to CAPs would not have been cheap, but was well within U.S. capabilities.

Of course, Westmoreland stuck with the search and destroy tactic. But why not give the U.S. commander the CAP option? It can be used in the campaign game as well as a play balance tool in the scenarios between players of unequal skill.

The following rules should be used with the Marine Alternative:

1. Allow the U.S. player to institute a nationwide CAP program at a cost of 120 commitment points. The U.S. player could build one in

I Corps alone at a cost of 20 commitment points, and later start a nationwide program for 100 commitment points.

2. The effects of the CAP program are:

a) each cultivated hex will defend itself with a strength of 1 if an NLF unit chooses to attack it. Essentially, the marines are giving each hex's regional forces, rule 11.2, the incentive to fight.

b) an NLF unit or stack of units can move through cultivated hexes with no movement penalty, nor do they have to attack. Cultivated hexes cannot force incidental attacks.

c) the cultivated hex can call in air and artillery support fire, and U.S. or ARVN replacements may be used to fill combat losses. However, if the CAPs suffer more than two point losses, combat ends (the CAPs have been overwhelmed) and no replacements need be lost. If the CAPs lose one, the U.S. player may opt to use a replacement point and continue combat, or allow the CAPs to be overwhelmed by not filling the loss.

d) Rule 7.2, Limits to Artillery Support, applies to CAP combat as well.

e) CAPs may never be used to attack. They are strictly defensive.

f) VC supply conduits may not be built in cultivated hexes that have CAPs.

g) Regional forces may still be used by defending Allied units normally. However, if the Allied unit is destroyed, or retreats out of the hex, the CAP is considered destroyed as well.

h) A side record of the hex numbers that have had their CAPs destroyed should be kept. At the end of any seasonal interphase, the U.S. player may reinstitute CAPs in up to three of them for every U.S. replacement point expended. However, no NLF unit may occupy the hex at that time.

g) An NLF unit can be considered to occupy a cultivated hex for pacification purposes (in the campaign game) or victory point purposes (in the scenarios) only if the CAP has been eliminated.

h) Cultivated hexes on the border between two Corps zones are considered to have CAPs if one of the Corps has them.

i) The CAP program may be dismantled any seasonal interphase, but may not be rebuilt. The U.S. player regains the full commitment he spent if he dismantles the program. A CAP program must be dismantled for, or with, final withdrawal.

