

PROJECT
Contemporary
Historical
Examination of
Current
Operations
REPORT

Air Response
to the
Tet Offensive
30 January - 29 February, 1968

HQ PACAF
Directorate, Tactical Evaluation
CHECO Division

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PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in USAF airpower being employed to meet a multitude of requirements. These varied applications have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, operational data and experiences have accumulated which should be collected, documented, and analyzed for current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity which would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA and would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet the Air Staff directive. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements in Southeast Asia, Project CHECO provides a scholarly "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation--recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert E. Hiller".

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Director of Operations Analysis
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| FOREWORD | vi |
| <u>CHAPTER I - OVERVIEW OF TET OFFENSIVE</u> | 1 |
| <u>CHAPTER II - BASE DEFENSE</u> | 12 |
| Tan Son Nhut | 13 |
| Bien Hoa | 16 |
| Da Nang | 17 |
| Binh Thuy | 18 |
| Passive Defense | 19 |
| Lessons Learned | 20 |
| <u>CHAPTER III - AIRSTRIKES AROUND THE CITIES</u> | 26 |
| Tan Hoa | 27 |
| Baria | 28 |
| Hue | 31 |
| Dalat | 36 |
| IV Corps | 38 |
| <u>CHAPTER IV - AIRLIFT</u> | 42 |
| <u>CHAPTER V - VNAF RESPONSE TO TET OFFENSIVE</u> | 55 |
| <u>CHAPTER VI - CIVIC ACTION</u> | 61 |
| <u>CHAPTER VII - LEVEL OF EFFORT</u> | 68 |
| FOOTNOTES | |
| Chapter I | 74 |
| Chapter II | 75 |
| Chapter III | 77 |
| Chapter IV | 79 |
| Chapter V | 80 |
| Chapter VI | 81 |
| Chapter VII | 82 |
| APPENDIXES | |
| I - SUMMARY OF AIRSTRIKES | 84 |
| II - CARGO MOVEMENTS | 90 |
| GLOSSARY | 92 |

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FIGURES

Follows Page

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Tet Offensive | 4 |
| 2. VC Probes | 14 |
| 3. Attack on Bien Hoa | 16 |
| 4. Attack on ARMCO Bin Revetment | 20 |
| 5. VNAF/USAF Strikes on Tan Hoa - Tan Phu Trung | 28 |
| 6. Attack Areas at Hue | 32 |
| 7. Airstrikes on Hue | 34 |
| 8. VNAF Strikes on Dalat | 38 |
| 9. USAF Strikes - Ben Tre | 40 |

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FOREWORD

This report traces the 1968 Communist Tet Offensive in Vietnam. Significant events which had an impact on airpower, and the application and responsiveness of air, are examined during this period of extremely heightened military activity. Air response ranged across the entire spectrum of air capability, from tactical airstrikes to the ground defense of air installations. Close support of ground troops in cities, air base defense, VNAF performance, emergency airlift, and civic responsiveness are all examined in this report.

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CHAPTER I
OVERVIEW OF TET OFFENSIVE

This study defines the Tet Offensive as the heavy fighting which began on 30 January 1968 and continued to 29 February (arbitrary dates) throughout all South Vietnam. The chronological boundaries of the Tet Offensive were directly related to the intentions, objectives, and actions of the enemy, and the offensive could be termed closed when those aims were achieved, defeated, or superseded. Militarily, his objectives were not achieved; however, there are indications that his political aims received some degree of success.

Early in the campaign, the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), believed the enemy was trying to establish the conditions which existed in Laos prior to the Geneva Conventions. By occupying the border area with regular forces and establishing control of the cities by political uprisings, the enemy prepared for negotiations that would win recognition for the National Liberation Front (NLF). The Deputy Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (DEPCOMUSMACV) thought the objective was to establish a complete political and military victory with the end result of putting into power all elements of the new government.^{1/}

Documents confiscated during the offensive indicate the attacks were aimed at a military and political victory and a new government. For instance, the following excerpt from an enemy document said the offensive was to:^{2/}

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"Carry direct attack on all the headquarters of the enemy, to disrupt the U.S. imperialists will for aggression and to smash the Puppet Government and Puppet Army, the lackeys of the U.S. We (the Viet Cong) will restore power to the people... (to) fulfill our revolutionary task of establishing democracy throughout the country."

The question could be asked: Did the offensive begin with the surprise attacks on the cities during the Vietnamese New Year, or with the meticulous preparations begun many months before: MACV infiltration reports showed that more than 10,000 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops infiltrated to South Vietnam during the period August-November 1967, which brought the total NVA strength up to a minimum of 88,000 men and possible strength of more than 162,000. ^{3/}

The battles preceding the Tet Offensive at Loc Ninh, Dak To, and Bo Duc pulled many U.S. battalions out of populated lowlands into isolated border areas, helping to create a "border thinking" among U.S. personnel, who talked of having pushed the enemy to the borders and of having blocked his return to the populated regions. The siege of Khe Sanh, which began in mid-January, further encouraged this optimistic viewpoint because the combat base lay on Route 9, the natural infiltration route for NVA troops skirting west around the DMZ. Yet, while U.S. troops were concerned with the borders, the enemy encircled the cities and military bases with troops and supplies for the Tet attacks. ^{4/}

No clearcut date exists for the termination of the offensive. If the enemy's objective was the permanent occupation of the cities, then the

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offensive failed in the first week. But if the objective was the reversal of a deteriorating military situation, by drawing allied troops out of the rural areas into the cities, then the enemy offensive continued for many months, as shown by the early May offensive. Despite VC-NVA promises to their troops that the winter-spring campaign would cause the population of the cities to defect to the NLF, the temporary aims of the offensive were apparently to seize the countryside by diversionary attacks on the cities and to encourage anti-war sentiment in the United States.

In this view, the offensive was a major and sustained escalation of the fighting toward the general objective of the war of national liberation. Therefore, while the cutoff date of 29 February may seem arbitrary, it roughly coincides with a return to "normal" operations, such as the resumption of scheduled airlift missions.

By the end of February, Hue had also been recaptured and on 10 March, the Allies initiated the massive offensive Operation QUYET THANG (Rescue to Win) in III Corps to push the enemy away from Saigon and Bien Hoa.

At midnight on 29-30 January, the Vietnamese Year of the Monkey began amid the traditional cacophony of fireworks and the crush of milling crowds. Under cover of the Tet truce and exploding firecrackers, the enemy attacked most of the major cities in II Corps--Nha Trang, Kontum, Pleiku, Ban Me Thout, Qui Nhon--and Da Nang in I Corps. Vietnamese and Free World Forces headquarters and airfields suffered heavy mortar and ground attacks as significant portions of each city fell into enemy hands. Fighting continued throughout the day and by 1800 hours all air bases were in Condition Red in

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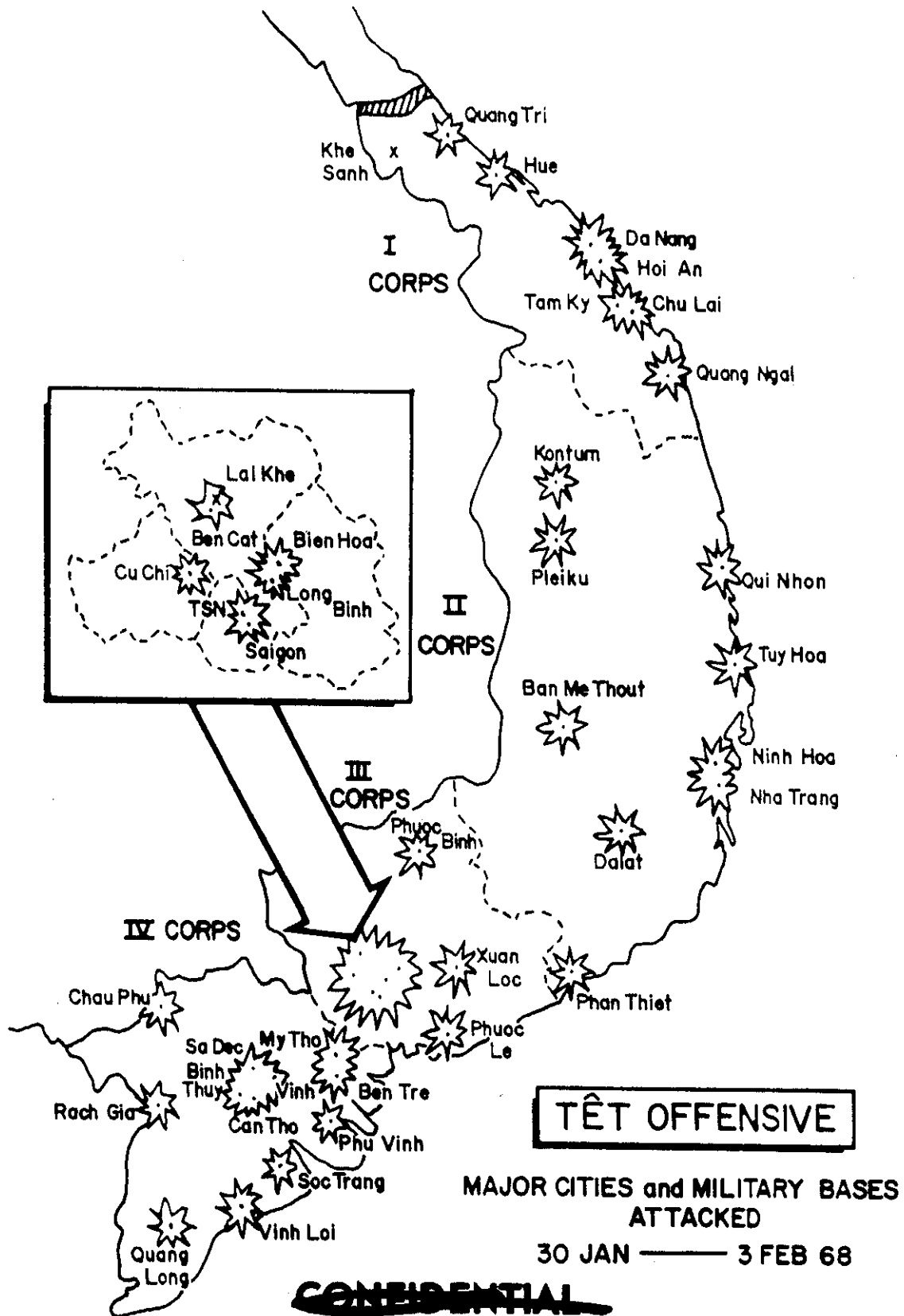
anticipation of terrorist attacks during the coming night.

At 0300 hours on 31 January, simultaneous attacks occurred the length of South Vietnam. At Hue, the Air Force lost eight observation planes when the enemy overran the airstrip and most of the city. ^{5/} South from Quang Tri City, the major towns battled the enemy, although around the DMZ, the enemy held back and seemed to mass for the siege of Khe Sanh. In II Corps, heavy battles continued in the major cities, although Dalat was not attacked until 1 February. In III Corps, the pattern of simultaneous assaults on most of the provincial capitals did not materialize. Rather, the VC concentrated on the cluster of cities and bases around Saigon and Bien Hoa. In Saigon, the American Embassy, the Presidential Palace, and Tan Son Nhut Airfield experienced heavy fighting which, in some cases, penetrated American defenses. In IV Corps, the pattern of I and II Corps was repeated--nearly every provincial capital was infiltrated and the government facilities besieged. Across the country, the unprecedented magnitude of the enemy offensive threw the Allies onto the defensive, forcing the abandonment of much of the countryside in an effort to protect the cities. (Fig. 1.)

The people of South Vietnam were shocked by these attacks which were aimed mainly at heavily inhabited centers. Assassination and terror squads roamed the provincial and district centers with the intent of eliminating political and religious leaders. Their objective was twofold. First, it would remove the cohesive force of the government. Second, it would eliminate potential participants in the coalition government, if such an

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Figure 1

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event could be brought about. Various terrorist ploys were adopted. For example, on several occasions, the VC committed acts of plunder, while wearing government uniforms, in an effort to discredit government soldiers. Although the people understood and respected force, an adverse effect was created as reports indicated the population resented these attacks which destroyed their homes, created food shortages, and killed and maimed thousands of innocent people.^{6/}

In Saigon, ARVN Operation TRAN HUNG DAO (4-17 February) cleared the city after many days of severe street fighting against an enemy well-concealed in the maze of refugee slums. Entire blocks of Cholon burned, as a result of the Allies employing airstrikes and tanks to drive the VC out of strongholds such as the Phu Tho racetrack. Adding to the holocaust, the enemy also initiated fires to cover his movement and to hinder friendly troops.^{7/}

Other cities suffering major damage from enemy attacks and allied counterattacks included Hue, Nha Trang, Ban Me Thout, Dalat, and Ben Tre. The latter evoked the much quoted statement by a U.S. Army officer that "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it."^{8/}

On 18 February, another, though very much weaker, enemy offensive began, with the main thrust in IV and III Corps. At Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa, intermittent 122-mm rocket bombardments began and continued sporadically throughout the month. During the next few days, the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing photographed the area as far as 11 miles from Tan Son Nhut

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to pinpoint potential rocket launch sites. A week later, a photo mosaic revealed four enemy sampans and led to the capture of miscellaneous rocket equipment. ^{9/}

Rocket attacks also put a heavy drain on strained FAC resources, and required some to be pulled away from visual reconnaissance (VR) in the rural and border areas. VR missions before Tet had not observed enough unusual enemy traffic on the jungle trails and canals toward the cities and military installations to alert intelligence personnel of the scope of the enemy infiltration, but there had been a noted increase in trail use. ^{10/} After Tet, the pullback of American and Vietnamese troops in III Corps to the populated areas also pulled the FACs out of the unpopulated areas, and allowed the enemy to move unobserved in positioning resupplies for the continuing offensive and for the southwest monsoon season (May-October). For example: the FACs at Dau Tieng in Tay Ninh were moved back to Bien Hoa when the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, came in from the field.

With initiation of the enemy rocket harassment campaign, a 24-hour "rocket watch" was flown over Saigon-Bien Hoa, one which the various FAC elements in III Corps had to support if feasible. In the first five days of harassment, beginning on 18 February, the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron (III Corps) flew an average of 47 hours each night compared to the late January average of two or three hours. ^{11/}

By the end of the month, the flying hours on rocket watch were cut back and the FACs freed for more VR missions in the border regions and traditional

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enemy sanctuaries. The return of American infantry to rural operations also put the FACs back in the outlying regions. They reported unprecedented traffic from Cambodia with some "trails" more like highways.

The much discussed "phases" of the Tet Offensive require comment. Army and Air Force intelligence sources quite often divided the offensive into phases in search of patterns in enemy operations. Timetables from various confiscated documents gave differing but not necessarily mutually exclusive schedules for victory. One confiscated diary, with the heading "Offensive Schedule", gave these dates: ^{12/}

28 January: First phase of general offensive and general uprising

17 February: Second phase

3 March : Third Phase

The first two phases generally coincided with other evaluations and with events, but the third phase did not materialize in the form of enemy attacks. Another confiscated document also talked of a planned third phase: ^{13/}

"In this third phase, we should try to use the fifth columnists in troop proselytizing to seize the objective."

There were indications that the VC infrastructure was uncertain about higher headquarters policy and phase timing. The following excerpt from an enemy intermediate command level document stated: ^{14/}

"In compliance with the policy of higher echelon, Anh Tan Current Affairs Committee...has prescribed

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the time frame for each phase (as follows):

"Phase 1: January, February, and March--liberate the rural areas.

"Phase 2: April, May, and June--complete the national democratic revolution."

However, this second timetable was not incompatible with the view that three phases were planned from late January to early March. In retrospect, this analysis appears to be the most plausible, possibly because the phases are broader, allowing more flexibility and adjustment.

Another opinion came from COMUSMACV within a few days of the massive Tet attacks. He outlined his conception of enemy plans as having three phases:

Phase 1: Border campaign at Loc Ninh and Dak To

Phase 2: Tet attack on the cities

Phase 3: Attack on Khe Sanh

The view that Dak To and Loc Ninh were preparatory phases to Tet was contradicted by Colonel Tran Van Duc, a defector to the Allies in April. Under interrogation, he said the local unit commanders had asked for these attacks to build morale and gain combat experience. Of course, approval from higher headquarters may have been for longer-range reasons (such as Tet) than those given by the unit commanders. ^{15/}

Operation NIAGARA at Khe Sanh, and its massive air support, apparently stopped the third phase of this timetable. COMUSMACV's schedule had a major similarity with the three-phase view of attacks from late January to

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early March--the trailing away of enemy strength after the first attacks, so that he could not mount a decisive third offensive.

It was concluded that there was no single set of phases that outlined each step and required an ironclad enemy adherence, blind to the realities of allied resistance. The Tet Offensive did draw the Allies out of the rural areas; it did raise serious doubts about how close the enemy was to defeat; and it did cost the Air Force millions of dollars in destroyed and damaged property. This was done, however, at a staggering cost in enemy dead--estimated in the tens of thousands. Hence, no final assault occurred at Khe Sanh, and the 18 February offensive was a shadow of Tet. In fact, the latter appeared to just fade away as the VC/NVA exhibited a growing reluctance to maintain contact with allied forces and showed signs of concern over their supplies. The most dramatic evidence of enemy supply problems was their sharply increased naval activity. Apparently willing to accept heavy losses, they attempted to resupply certain units by employing the risky gambit of landing junks and trawlers on the coasts of I, II, and IV Corps. ^{16/} Airstrikes had a disruptive effect on enemy resupply efforts and may have been instrumental in delaying future offensive plans. Airstrikes also repeatedly hit supply routes near the Cambodian Border, taking a heavy toll on sampans and other cargo carriers. ^{17/}

In the cases of Khe Sanh and the general Tet Offensive, the Air Force played a major role due to the advantages airpower had against an enemy who concentrated his ground troops for attack. Along the edges and occasionally deep into the cities, the close air support, in conjunction with artillery

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and ground forces, killed enemy troops by the hundreds whenever they gathered for an assault. The reliance of Army troops on tactical air, expending for the first time on cities, caused heavy urban damage, the price paid for clearing out an infiltrated enemy. The successful resistance of all air bases to ground attacks helped blunt the offensive and provided ideal staging areas for allied counterattacks. Thus, in the straight-out fighting, the Air Force successfully met the surge requirements of the enemy offensive.

Confiscated documents point to a clearly perceptible theme--the communists based their hope for eventual success in cities on a general uprising by the populace. Enemy documents state that initially there was a general enthusiastic response to the "uprising", but a few days later these same people showed signs of being dubious about the outcome of the battle (particularly in the Saigon area). On at least one occasion, the seed for doubt was planted by "so many aircraft overhead".^{18/} Air presence had a definite psychological impact.

There were, however, some disquieting notes. For example, the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) liberal leave policy for the Tet holidays left it unprepared for heavy sustained operations. Without the assumption of many flight line and cockpit jobs by Air Force advisors, there is doubt that the VNAF could have met its responsibilities in the first few days of Tet.^{19/}

Under the strain of mushrooming airlift requirements, the already near-saturated airlift became inundated to the point that its priority system became ineffectual. This arose from not having enough C-130s in-country to

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handle requests. Yet, to keep increasing the number of airframes in-country would require expansion of ground facilities and more support troops--a further U.S. involvement in the war. Caught in this dilemma, the airlift could not handle the surge requirements of Tet because it did not have the resources.

Civic action and nation building programs also suffered during Tet, because so many of the rural areas were abandoned and because the offensive disrupted routine projects. For instance, 24-hour curfews confined personnel to the air bases. Humanitarian relief to Tet Offensive victims from Air Force donations and airlift missions was significant, and doubtlessly much appreciated by the Vietnamese people, but this was a definite shift from long-term improvement projects.

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CHAPTER II

BASE DEFENSE

USAF air bases had been attacked by mortars, rockets, and ground forces in the past, but the magnitude of the Tet assault was unprecedented. Coordination and timing for such widespread attacks were sharp, with one possible exception, Da Nang Air Base, which was taken under fire approximately 24 hours earlier than the almost simultaneous attacks on other installations.^{1/}

As a result of the premature assault on Da Nang plus other intelligence indicators that attacks were imminent, the Commander, Seventh Air Force, directed Security Condition Red (Option 1) be implemented at all Vietnam air bases. The directive was given a full nine hours prior to the initiation of the Tet Offensive and proved invaluable to Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa Air Bases in their successful repulsion of the initial attacks.^{2/}

The extensive base attacks probably had several objectives, which ranged from overrun to harassment, but certainly they were aimed at preventing allied reinforcements and air support of the Marine Khe Sanh outpost, where a large scale enemy offensive was expected.^{3/}

The following is an account of the attacks on Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, Da Nang, and Binh Thuy air facilities. Although other bases faced similar problems in one degree or another, it is significant to note that no major USAF base was overrun or forced to go non-operational.

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Tan Son Nhut

What could well have been one of the most significant battles of the war was fought at Tan Son Nhut on 31 January 1968. The enemy had gathered a force of sufficient size (approximately seven battalions) with the apparent intent to overrun and occupy, at least temporarily, the air nerve center of South Vietnam. This intention was substantiated by confiscated documents: the enemy battle plan did not call for withdrawal, but directed units to hold until reinforced or issued further instructions.

Reacting to intelligence estimates that some form of enemy action would take place, the Tan Son Nhut security forces conducted a training exercise on 27 January 1968. In the exercise, appropriately nicknamed TET, it was assumed the enemy would attempt to penetrate the western perimeter near Gate 051. This soon proved to be a valid assumption. ^{4/}

The friendly and enemy forces engaged were: ^{5/}

| <u>FRIENDLY</u> | <u>PERS</u> | <u>ENEMY</u> | <u>EST PERS</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Security Police | 457 | C-10 Sapper Battalion | |
| Quick Reaction Teams | 104 | 267th VC Battalion | |
| Reserve Security Police | 254 | 16th VC Battalion | |
| Task Force 35 | 90 | 269th VC Battalion | |
| TOTAL | 905 | 90th 1st NVA Battalion | |
| | | 6th Local Force Battalion | |
| USA Battalions 4 ----- | Unknown | 2d Local Force Battalion | |
| ARVN Battalions 5 ----- | Unknown | | |
| Miscellaneous ----- | Unknown | | |
| | | APPROX TOTAL | 3,000 |

The miscellaneous friendly forces included artillery platoons, Army helicopter Light Fire Teams, C-47 gunships, and various regional and popular forces. Task Force 35 was comprised mainly of the 6th Army Signal Battalion

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members who were stationed at Tan Son Nhut. Enemy battalions contained approximately 450-500 men.

On 31 January 1968, at 0330 hours, the guards on the northern perimeter sounded the alarm that several hundred men were moving west to east. Minutes later, Bunker 051, on the western edge of the installation, reported a large force assaulting the position. Quick Reaction Teams and two platoons of Task Force 35 were immediately dispatched to the area as the initial blocking force.

The 267th VC Battalion, about half of them North Vietnamese, led the assault force into the breach and eventually made the deepest penetration. After a direct mortar hit on Bunker 051, the enemy occupied it and made it a strong point for the attack. Sharp fighting took place near that bunker throughout the night. Meanwhile, enemy pressure was brought to bear around the entire base perimeter. By 0500 hours, there had been ground probes at essentially all of the base gates (Fig. 2), the adjacent Vietnamese Joint General Staff complex, plus MACV Headquarters.

The crest of the VC intrusion was reached at approximately 0530 hours, for by this time they had penetrated the west edge of the base, 600 meters deep and 300 meters wide. ^{6/}

As daylight approached, Army reinforcements started to arrive, buttressing the base defense force. Their arrival was extremely timely and fortunate. Timely, because an enemy exploitation battalion was right on the heels of the first attackers, with a third battalion in reserve. Fortunate, because for

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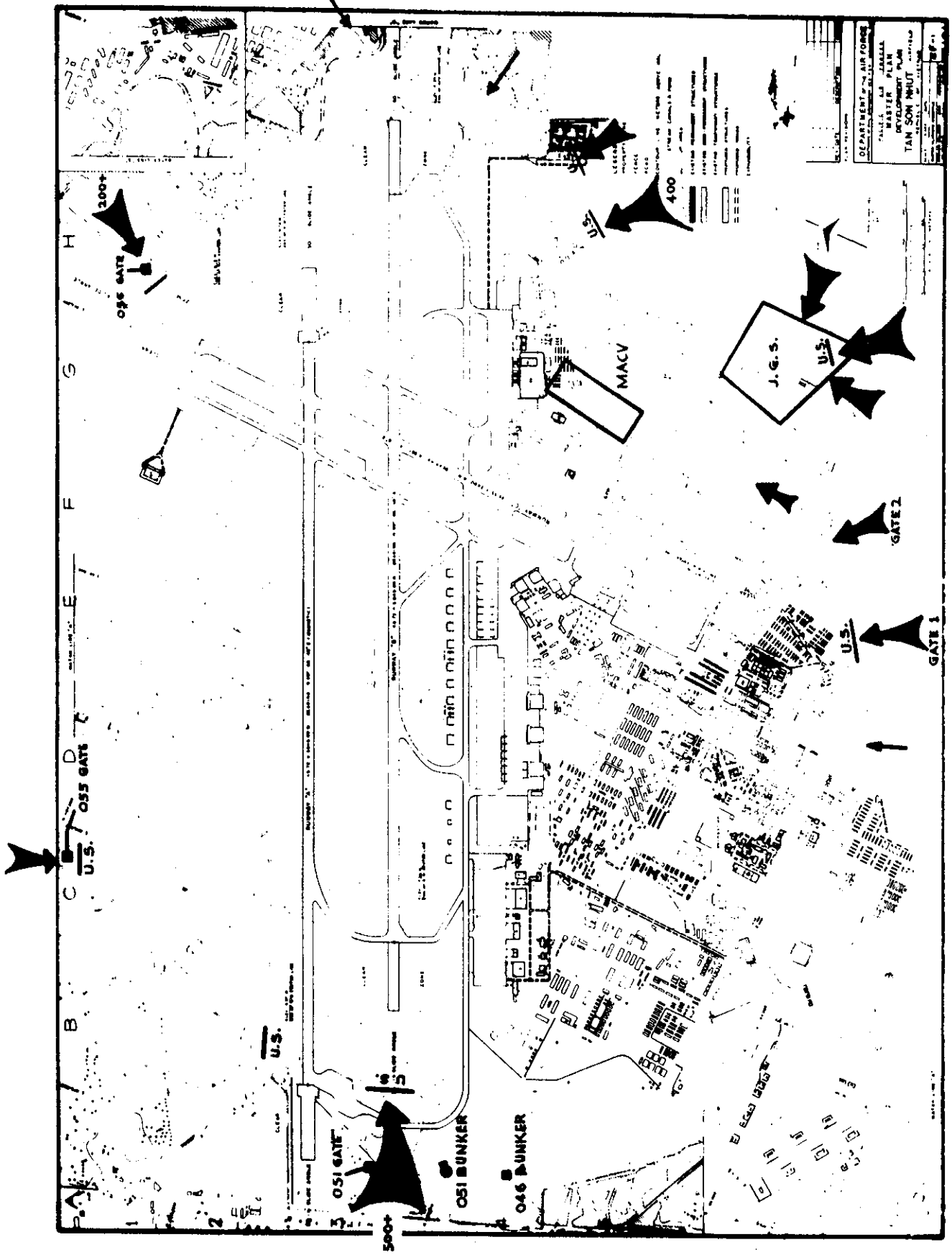


Figure 2

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some unknown reason, a bridge on the outskirts of Saigon was not disabled. Had the bridge been cut, the relief force would have been delayed sufficiently to allow further enemy exploitation, the outcome of which can only be speculated ^{7/}

While the defenders cut down the Viet Cong, who had moved through the wire, gunships poured fire on the bulk of the enemy coming up behind, thereby blunting the intensity of the attack. At mid-morning, the enemy initiated another assault accompanied by heavy ground and mortar fire. As it turned out, the objective of this effort was solely to cover withdrawal of the wounded and part of the main force, which were still inside the perimeter. By 1300 hours, the perimeter was secure; however, immediately outside the base heavy fighting continued. Small arms/automatic weapons fire and probing actions continued through 9 February 1968. ^{8/}

Forward Air Controllers (FACs) kept the enemy engaged during the entire action by adjusting artillery and controlling airstrikes. Of note was the engagement at the VINATEXCO textile factory located northwest of Tan Son Nhut. An U.S. Army unit--the 3/4th Cavalry--reported that it was receiving heavy small arms fire from this factory. Clearance for an airstrike was obtained and the first ordnance was put in by the VNAF 33d Wing, followed by USAF F-100 strikes. Large secondary explosions were observed. A follow-up ground sweep of the factory revealed 95 percent destruction and 170 VC body count. Total VC body count in and around Tan Son Nhut was more than 900. ^{9/}

Throughout the month of February, no further ground attacks occurred,

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but another menace to the installation appeared at 0100 hours, on 18 February, when the first of thirty 122-mm rockets impacted on the base. By 1 March, six more attacks occurred and in all, one hundred twenty-eight 122-mm rockets and eight 75-mm recoilless rifle rounds landed on the facility. ^{10/}

During these sever attacks, nine USAF personnel were killed and 102 wounded. Damage was considerable, with seven aircraft destroyed and 75 damaged, plus some facilities and material losses. ^{11/} (The mortar and rocket threat will be discussed in further detail under passive defense.)

Bien Hoa

As in the attack on Tan Son Nhut, post battle intelligence reports indicate the objective of the 31 January 1968 attack was to penetrate and occupy Bien Hoa Air Base. ^{12/}

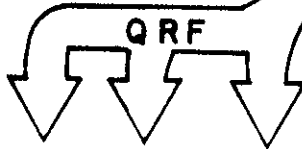
Interrogation of prisoners revealed that the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 274th VC Regiment, about 68 percent North Vietnamese, comprised the enemy force. Opposing them were 413 USAF Security Police, VNAF Security Forces, and elements of the 101st Airborne Division. ^{13/}

At approximately 0300 hours, on 31 January, an estimated 35 rounds of 122-mm rocket fire and 10 rounds of 82-mm mortar fire impacted on the base. The missile attack was followed immediately by a ground assault on the eastern perimeter of the base. The enemy immediately bypassed and surrounded Bunker 10, continued their penetration, and captured the engine test stand along the eastern taxiway. (Fig. 3.) U.S. Army helicopter Light Fire Teams from the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion, supported by AC-47 gunships, were

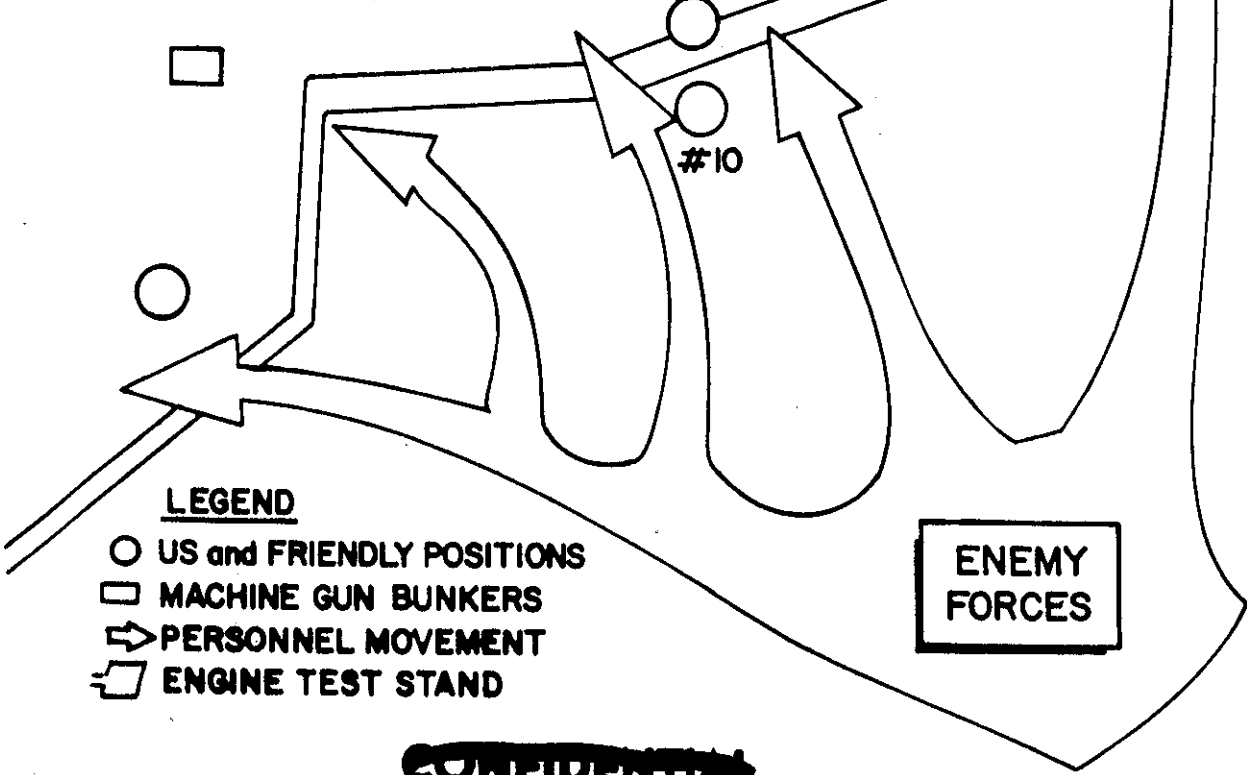
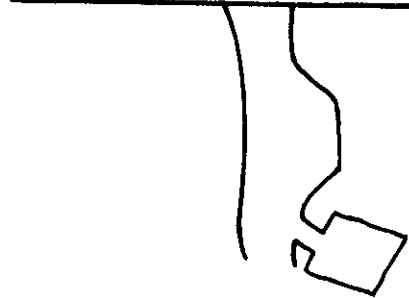
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ATTACK
ON
BIEN HOA



EAST OVERRUN



- LEGEND**
- US and FRIENDLY POSITIONS
 - MACHINE GUN BUNKERS
 - ➔ PERSONNEL MOVEMENT
 - ⊞ ENGINE TEST STAND

ENEMY
FORCES

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Figure 3

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brought to bear on the enemy. The friendly forces halted the advance at the test stand and by dawn proceeded to drive the enemy back. ^{14/}

By 1640 hours, on 31 January, the enemy was swept off the base but, as with Tan Son Nhut, sniper fire continued sporadically for the next two days. After Action Reports list USAF casualties as 4 KIA and 26 WIA with enemy casualties of 139 KIA (body count) and 25 POWs. Friendly forces in the Bien Hoa area claimed more than 400 enemy KIA. The 3d TFW lost two aircraft and had ten damaged. Facility damage was modest. ^{15/}

There were no further ground assaults but the communists began a pattern of missile harassment, and struck with a total of 83 rockets on 9, 11, 13, 18, and 28 February. The majority of the rockets were 122-mm with delayed fuzing. The loss due to the rocket attacks was appreciable. There were 12 USAF personnel killed and 91 injured, plus a total of 7 aircraft destroyed and 25 damaged. ^{16/}

Da Nang

As mentioned earlier, Da Nang was struck approximately 24 hours prior to the general assault. It was taken under fire by 122-mm rockets at 0332 hours, on 30 January 1968. A rocket crater temporarily closed the east runway, but the west runway remained open and the facility remained operational. An airborne C-47 sighted a suspected rocket-firing position and the counter-artillery plan was executed, but as happens so often, the results were unknown. In this case, the rocket attack was not followed by a determined ground assault and only light probes were attempted. ^{17/}

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On 1 and 3 February 1968, 26 rounds of 122-mm rockets fell on the base, and again on 24 February, 10 rounds of 122-mm hit the air base. ^{18/}

Binh Thuy

The southernmost USAF base in Vietnam was under constant attack during the early stages of heightened activity. This relatively vulnerable Delta base, normally subjected to greater harassment than other Vietnam air facilities, underwent ten separate attacks from the opening of the offensive until 13 February 1968. However, no serious ground assault was attempted by the enemy. One aircraft was destroyed and 27 were damaged. ^{19/}

During and prior to Tet, the VC had launched their missiles at Binh Thuy with relative impunity from the same general area--160 to 190 degrees south of the air base. Airstrikes and ground sweeps south of the base had increased since early February 1968; however, the results of the airstrikes were generally unknown, with the exception of an AC-47 gunship which reported silencing one .50-caliber position. ^{20/}

The constant state of high alert maintained by Binh Thuy personnel resulted in the following message to Seventh Air Force on 5 February 1968: ^{21/}
"Unit mission capability is decreasing rapidly due to the requirement to maintain a constant state of maximum readiness against the threat of a major ground assault." Seventh Air Force implemented Operation Plan COMMAHJO ABOVE, and airlifted a 50-man Quick Reaction Mobility Force to that station. ^{22/}

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Passive Defense

The rapid buildup and crowding of air installations provided an increasingly lucrative and irresistible target for the Communist forces. Their attacks on air bases ranged from minor sabotage efforts to major incursions inflicting losses of life and materiel. The Tet offensive highlighted limitations in aircraft protection against conventional weapons, particularly rockets and mortars.

The mortar and rocket threat to USAF aircraft became a reality on 30 January 1968, as the increasing tempo of rocket fire, first used at Da Nang AB on 27 February 1967, reached an unacceptable level less than a year later.^{23/} This pronounced rocket capability should not have come as a surprise as intelligence estimates continually assessed, and subsequently warned of newer and more sophisticated rockets being infiltrated to South Vietnam.

From 30 January until 29 February 1968, enemy rocket and mortar fire destroyed nine USAF Strike/Recce aircraft. Thirteen Strike/Recce aircraft also sustained major damage and 64 required minor repairs. The lack of adequate shelter was a contributing factor in the loss of these valuable resources. The ARMC0 metal bin revetment, in extensive use in SEA, had only served the purpose for expediency and assisted in containing the spread of fires. These 12-foot high earth-filled bins could be rapidly assembled and were relatively inexpensive.^{24/} The threat, however, had progressed from the 82-mm mortar to the 122-mm to 140-mm rocket. Also, the possibility of an enemy air attack existed during Tet, as six IL-28 (BEAGLE) light bombers were reported in the southern area of North Vietnam--well within striking

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range of Tan Son Nhut. At that time, there was concern in the intelligence community that a successful air attack would be of sufficient advantage to Hanoi that an attempt would be made regardless of the high risk. The ARMC0 bin revetment could not withstand an 122-mm rocket, nor could it negate a CBU, napalm or a strafing attack. (Fig. 4.) With the basic assumption that United States' presence would continue in SEA, an immediate and long-term solution was required. New impetus was given to a program to obtain covered shelters.

Lessons Learned

Comparing the lessons learned by various bases on self defense procedures and requirements during the Tet Offensive with past experience revealed two pertinent facts. First, some lessons were re-learned and second, the large and sustained attacks pointed out new areas requiring action. Lessons re-learned were:

The limitations on an effective defoliation program were again identified as a problem. Previous End of Tour Reports by Security and Law Enforcement officers had continually stressed the need for an extended clear area. ^{25/} The Tet attack on Bien Hoa served as a case in point: ^{26/}

"It has been especially difficult to receive permission from civilian and VNAF authorities to defoliate. Face to face arguments with the Province Chief were necessary as well as lies, threats, etc...The on-base area where a large portion of the VC infiltrated into had been burned a mere eight hours prior to the attack...The grass was six feet high."

To complement defoliation, a free fire zone of up to 1,000 meters was desired by those responsible for security. However, lack of available real

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Attack on ARMC0 B1n Revetment

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estate continued to be a limiting factor.

Reliance upon the RVNAF for base defense was again questioned. In the After Action Report of the Tet Offensive at Bien Hoa, the Chief of Security, wrote: ^{27/}

"All security plans and procedures should be taken with complete disregard for VNAF security forces. Past experience has proven they cannot be depended on. This attack verified it. At one guard position all the (Regional Force) guards were asleep...."

The Chief of Security Police at Tan Son Nhut recorded in his After Action Report: ^{28/}

"It has been determined from battlefield reports that at the point of penetration some personnel of the 2nd Services Battalion (ARVN) deserted... It is apparent that there is a need for close coordination between Vietnamese and U.S. forces involved in the combined defense of an installation...."

These two observations echo the report by a U.S. Army Captain, who, in September 1964, was tasked by COMUSMACV to investigate and make recommendations on air base defense. ^{29/}

"They (ARVN) are lax, poorly trained, and undisciplined. Visual inspections of the posts or bunkers revealed that less than 50% of the post or bunkers had a man in position performing his duty...."

In all fairness and to complete the record, there were also cases of exemplary and courageous performances among Vietnamese individuals and units. These distinct observations, however, separated by time and space, point to

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a need for co-manning, by U.S. and Vietnamese, of air base defensive positions.

The most profitable lesson learned was the value of the Quick Reaction (Mobile) Force (QRF). Early during the attacks, security personnel on at least one base soon manifested extreme fatigue. Even if the fatigue was caused by an over-reaction to the threat (over-reaction can only be evaluated in retrospect) the point is still made--the fresh troops bolstered the defense capability and relieved pressure on the beleaguered base. ^{30/}

As a result of this valuable lesson, Seventh Air Force created a 500-man QRF in place at Phan Rang AB. The contingent, which should have been available during the Tet offensive, was TDY. It was scheduled to be replaced in August 1968 by a permanent Army Ranger-trained, 500-man force. The TDY group was composed of more than 90 percent volunteers, many having previously served a tour in SEA, some as recently as November 1967. Plans called for airlifting this force, with a two-hour reaction time, to any base, either threatened, or actually under attack. ^{31/}

A large, base-stationed, Quick Reaction Team was also required to halt the enemy at an acceptable distance from priority resources. At Tan Son Nhut, for example, its QRTs were increased from eight teams (13 men each), which were available on Tet to 19 teams on permanent standby in their quarters and available for immediate dispatch. ^{32/}

Going it alone, at least initially, against a large-scale attack, upgraded security police weapon requirements from light weapons to mortars, rockets launchers, recoilless rifles, and grenade launchers. PACAF approved,

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and USAF proceeded to acquire 90-mm and 50-caliber weapons. As an interim measure, security forces throughout the theater made use of heavier weapons available from the U.S. Army. ^{33/}

Ground transportation to move QRTs quickly and safely to areas under attack was mandatory to adequately blunt shock attacks. The use of small armored personnel carriers was also considered. ^{34/}

More powerful and portable communication systems were also required to alleviate the problem of direct communication with supporting units, such as helicopter Light Fire Teams, AC-47 gunships, flareships, and artillery. ^{35/}

A gradual crippling of basic support functions on the air bases occurred when local national employees were unable, not permitted, or chose not to report for work. Since heavy dependence was placed on indigenous help for essential activities such as dining halls, sanitation facilities, laundries, and base exchanges, these activities became increasingly difficult to maintain. As the ceiling on U.S. personnel restricted U.S. manning of support activities, cross-training, and self-help planning were required.

The implementation of nightly rocket patrols by FACs over Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa had questionable results. A FAC from Bien Hoa stated: ^{36/}

"We've been unsuccessful in locating the rockets prior to launching. On the night of the 28th, I flew with the Spooky aircraft along the north of the Dong Nai river. He was dropping flares, I was flying between them and the ground. I observed nothing. We covered the area. At the same time, in the same general location there was an Army Firefly team with a search light

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performing visual reconnaissance. Two hours later, at 0100, a rocket came from the same general area that we all three had looked at at 2300. It appears it is impossible to locate a launch position under flares at night. I don't know the reason...."

Conversely, a FAC from Tan Son Nhut who spotted rocket flashes made the following observations. 37/

"However these flashes were a bit larger and after the second one I felt that it must be a rocket attack, against the air base. It's extremely difficult at night to pin-point your position. However, there are reference points in the area in the friendly positions that were well lit, and I could determine in relation to them the approximate position...In order to keep the point of the fire pin-pointed, I did not look at the air base, I kept my eyes on the spot where the fire was coming from and proceeded to it...I then directed Spooky to test fire his weapons at the position and again confirm with the ground units that we would not endanger any of them. We did this, they did confirm that the fire was not on their position and it appeared to be about center of all four of the known reference points around there...In review of the whole sequence of events since the first rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut, this one lasted considerably less than the first one, and it appears that the length of the firing has been shortened in each of the succeeding times, for example, if this rocket attack continued as long as the first one, I feel sure that I and that Spooky expended a good portion of our armament on the rocket position and it would have been much easier for us. But again we cannot make the assumption definite. Although I believe that it had some deterring effect, we cannot make the assumption definitely that my appearance on the scene with Spooky had a definite impact on what the VC did...."

The above opinion was much more optimistic than the average comments given by FACs. The 25th Infantry Division ALO told of his being on the rocket watch one night and spotting their launch site, which he reported. He refused to sanction airstrikes, however, on the coordinates he reported because of the possibility of error. Later that night, ground troops, acting

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on other information, found the launch site three kilometers south of the ALO's reported position. The ALO, who considered himself fortunate to have a good sense of space relationships, made the comment: 38/

"Now I know I speak for the FACs and the aviators that fly in there (Bien Hoa--Tan Son Nhut at night). We just don't feel that we can be that precise to bring down some devastating strikes on possible missile launch sites."

Regarding Passive Defense, the evidence clearly pointed toward some type of aircraft-covered shelter for an immediate solution--at least for the Strike/Recce fleet. The long-range solution required a multifaceted Program. First, hardening had to be considered for all SEA bases. Second, in concepts evolved from future research and development, consideration must be given to an increase in severity of enemy weapons, including aerial delivery. Finally, all aspects of the protective problem should be incorporated into original planning and designing of future airfields and aircraft. 39/

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CHAPTER III

AIRSTRIKES AROUND THE CITIES

The air bases, with their clearly defined perimeters, proved easier to defend than the cities with their maze of refugee slums bordering the outskirts. Thus, while all the air bases successfully resisted significant incursions, the towns were entered by the enemy, who often fought holding actions against counterattacking allied troops. Between opposing ground forces, the advantage lay with the "defenders"--the VC/NVA--who forced the Allies to conduct search-and-clear operations in house-to-house fighting. Even in outlying villages, where few concrete buildings stood, the advantage lay with the enemy, because many Vietnamese hamlets had bomb shelters dug beneath the houses; and some hamlets, whose inhabitants were sympathetic with the VC, had elaborate bunker-tunnel complexes.

Faced with the enemy's well dug in positions in the cities and towns, the Allies reluctantly resorted to heavy ordnance. Airpower was effective in destroying the buildings in which the enemy chose to hide. Whereas the enemy's heavier arms, such as the rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), often neutralized the allied mechanized armor, the enemy had little defense against air delivered ordnance. Thus, the Army tactics common to the rural operations--fix the enemy, pull back, bring in air--were used in and around the cities to reduce allied troop casualties. "Air" included Army artillery and helicopter gunships (with rockets), Navy offshore guns (in I Corps), and Australian, VNAF, and USAF fighters and gunships. The enemy set fire to parts of some towns and added to the damage by using rockets and mortars, but

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allied air delivered ordnance also destroyed parts of the towns and cities, especially Hue and Dalat. In the Vietnamese war, where no battle front existed, and the enemy occupied, abandoned, and reoccupied so many villages, the chances for urban destruction increased. Destroying "friendly" villages and towns to root out the enemy was of course not a new situation, but the cumulative damage from a number of offensives such as Tet would soon reach a significant proportion. For instance, the NVA occupied the village of Thon La Chu near Hue during the Tet offensive and brought down airstrikes on the village (Fig. 7). During the heavy fighting of early May 1968, they occupied other villages near Hue, which consequently suffered heavy damage. Re-building projects did not keep pace with the accumulating damage, and villagers sought shelter in refugee camps.

Tan Hoa

A dilemma for the Air Force was illustrated in a minor way by the total destruction during the early Tet fighting of the small town of Tan Hoa, five kilometers east of the 25th Infantry Division headquarters at Cu Chi. (Fig. 5.) The Division ALO commented on the fighting: ^{1/}

"On my first strike that I put in close to Saigon I had a bad feeling because the VC had moved into an area not far east of Cu Chi. The town was a nice little town, a pretty place, very picturesque in fact. I was advised that the province chief had cleared everybody out and we were cleared to attack any place the ground commander directed. The ground commander was on the western side of the town. I'd say he was about 100 to 200 meters into the town moving from west to east. He wanted air strikes put in from the south to the north in front of his troops, with heavy ordnance further to the east where he would be safe from the bomb blast.

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"I must say it was a little difficult to start putting in that kind of ordnance because I realized that before the day was out we were going to make a lot of people homeless. I had to assume that there weren't any friendlies down there or any innocent civilians. I believe there weren't; I'm quite sure there weren't because the civilians assured us that all had been evacuated. However, the VC were in there in great numbers. As I foresaw, within two days that town no longer existed. It's just a big scar on the earth now."

Army tanks and rocket-equipped gunships also contributed to that destruction, but often only heavy bombs could break down concrete structures and bunkers. As the ALO also pointed out, such towns had "an almost unlimited number of places" which the VC used for sniping positions, and from which they launched RPGs with deadly effectiveness against Army mechanized vehicles. The ground commander, rightly concerned first with his men's safety, requested air support and got the necessary Vietnamese clearance. The Air Force put in the ordnance as directed.

The Air Force airstrikes on the major cities were relatively few, because the defense of the cities was the responsibility of the ARVN supported by the VNAF. However, where American troops were engaged in urban fighting, the Air Force flew close air support missions. These are examples of fighting in the cities:

Baria

The city of Baria, province capital of Phouc Tuy, was struck on the morning of 1 February 1968 by an enemy force of approximately 700. Baria was located in III Corps to the southeast of Saigon, and was typical of the smaller province capitals that came under attack during Tet and were

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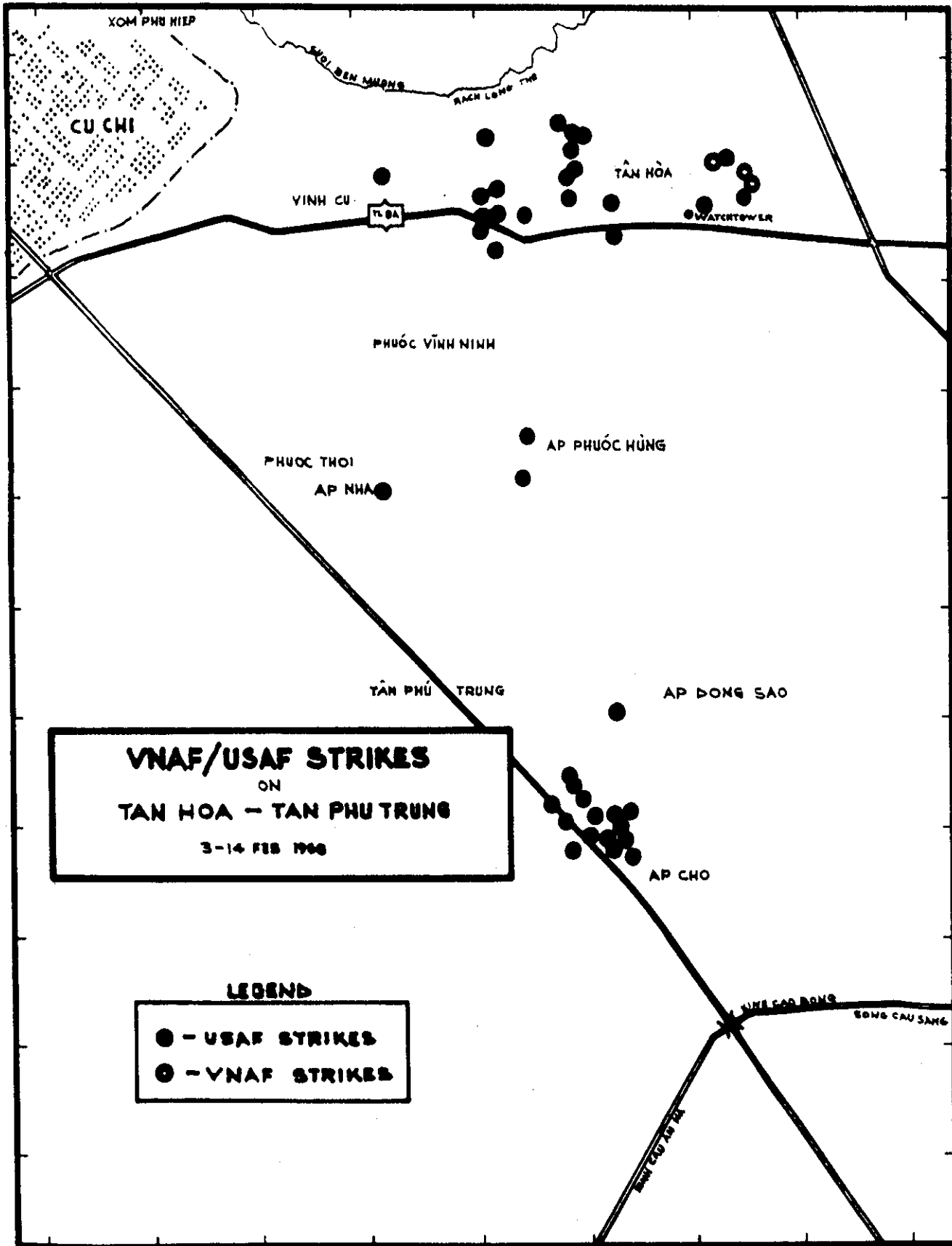


Figure 5

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fortunate enough to escape major damage.

The ground units opposing the communists were the 11th ARVN Airborne Battalion and the 4/48th ARVN Infantry Battalion. Air support was provided by FACs from Binh Thuy, Long Khanh, and Bier Hoa Provinces, while U.S. Army helicopter Light Fire Teams and USAF fighters provided eight strikes each. ^{2/}

The ALO of the 18th ARVN Division at Xuan Loc (just north of Baria) thought that the battle for Baria was particularly heavy: ^{3/}

"The Baria area was especially active. They had a lot more activity down there than they've had in all the preceding years of the war, at least since the U.S. has been involved. The VC were led to believe that they could walk in and take over the city."

The attack was initiated at 0445 hours and the ground forces immediately called for air support. Initial reports, however, were sketchy and all requests for air support were denied. At 0640 hours, with the exception of an O-1 dropping flares, there was no air support and the enemy vanguard was soon reported in the flight line area of the Baria airstrip. The airfield was eventually overrun, and the FACs and aircraft assigned there moved to another location, as it was like going up "Death Valley getting from the compound (living quarters) to the airplane." ^{4/}

By 0730 hours, the enemy had captured the Korean hospital and was attacking the National Police compound. The first air support to arrive on the scene was an Army helicopter Light Fire Team (LFT) at 0710 hours, followed closely by two more LFTs. At this time, friendly troops were surrounded

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in the southwest corner of the compound. All the LFTs expended their ordnance on the enemy assault positions and in doing so attracted ground fire, which was directed at both the FACs and LFTs, causing one helicopter to withdraw because of heavy casualties. ^{5/} The remaining LFTs were very effective in the close in fighting, particularly with their mini-guns. This mini-gun capability, coupled with their quick reaction time, was extremely advantageous. An experienced FAC stated that an Army pilot could get clearance to fire an LFT much more quickly than a FAC could get clearance to expend fixed-wing aircraft, including AC-47 gunships. ^{6/}

The first fighters that arrived put their heavy ordnance on suspected withdrawal routes and their softer weapons, such as napalm and CBUs, in close proximity to the troops. The pattern was indicative of fixed-wing use in urban fighting throughout the country. It was generally agreed that the fixed-wing had the firepower required for knocking out targets, but the closeness of troops and civilians left little room for error with hard ordnance, thus the heavy reliance on LFTs. However, LFT rocket accuracy was considered poorer than that of fixed-wing aircraft. ^{7/}

Throughout the day, LFTs, C-47 gunships, and fighters continued striking hostile positions similar to those just described. It was impossible to assist with air near the overrun airstrip, as the U.S. ground advisor to the 11th ARVN Airborne Battalion did not mark friendly positions in spite of repeated requests by the FACs. ^{8/}

By early afternoon, friendly ground units were moving in and around the town from the west, north, and east. LFTs continued to be directed on small

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pockets of enemy troops within the city, while fighters were expended primarily on withdrawal routes. Late in the afternoon, a FAC spotted the bulk of the enemy force attempting to withdraw to the north, and subsequently directed four flights of fighters on the avenues of retreat, inflicting heavy enemy casualties. By nightfall, little enemy resistance remained and the airstrip was again in friendly hands. ^{9/}

In the opinion of the ALO and FACs involved, the capture of a provincial capital was averted by the timely application of airpower, both Army and Air Force. The coordination required between ground and air was accomplished by constant and overlapping FAC coverage during the first 12 hours, and they were called on to simultaneously adjust artillery and direct airstrikes.

Several times during the day, the enemy was clearly visible but no firepower from helicopters or fighters was available. Friendly casualties were light with 39 KIA and 105 WIA. The effectiveness of air was unmistakable-- of 355 enemy KIA, 215 were attributed by air. ^{10/}

Hue

Unlike the struggles in other major cities throughout South Vietnam, the battle for Hue was protracted, lasting from 31 January to the end of February. The month-long contest within the city was characterized by close house-to-house combat, involving, at its peak, three U.S. Marine battalions, elements of the U.S. Cavalry Division, and 11 ARVN battalions. These friendly units were pitted against the 6th NVA Regiment comprised of eight NVA/VC Battalions. ^{11/}

The enemy realized that this attempt to seize and hold Hue might result

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in the destruction of the cultural and religious center of the nation, but the great propaganda value to be accrued, outweighed the almost certain destruction of the city. Timing their assault to coincide with the holiday leave of the bulk of the ARVN troops and National Police, the communists achieved complete tactical surprise. ^{12/}

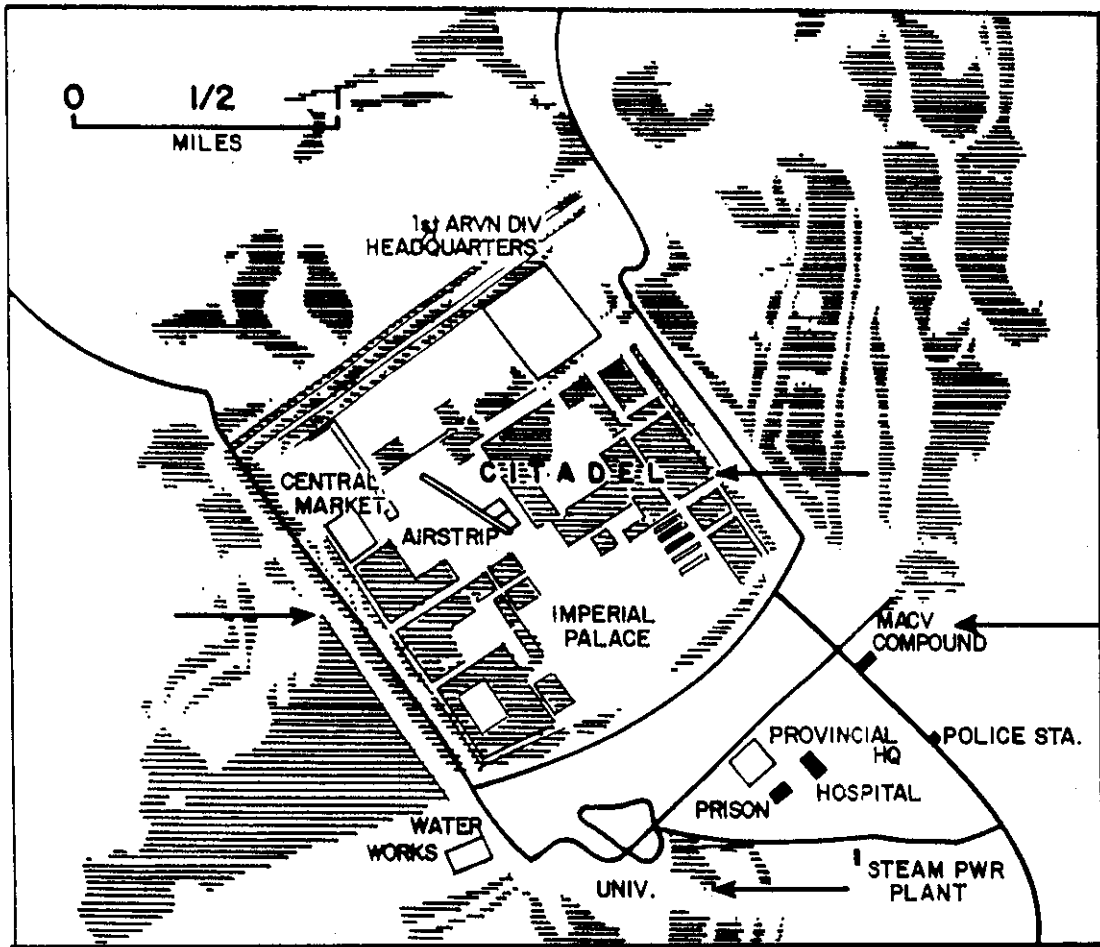
In a matter of hours, after the early morning opening volleys, the enemy controlled the area south of the city (which contained the MACV compound), the University of Hue, the Citadel, and a heavily-populated residential area. U.S. Marines arrived on the scene (Fig. 6) at 0830 hours on 31 January and proceeded to clear the area around the MACV compound, securing it by dark. ^{13/}

The defense of Hue was a Vietnamese responsibility and Lieutenant General Lam, the ARVN Commander, intended initially to recapture the city, using solely ARVN units. As the situation progressed, however, it soon became apparent that the strength of enemy forces was such that their expulsion would require outside assistance--the enemy had clearly come to stay. Battle forces of the ARVN and U.S. Marines gradually increased and soon steady progress was made against a heavily-entrenched enemy. Eventually, friendly forces were obliged to assault house-by-house and block-by-block in a locale foreign to their normal combat environment. ^{14/}

A factor which limited the rate of advance was the initial restriction on employment of certain supporting arms. The desire to reduce injury to noncombatants, coupled with the Vietnamese request to minimize destruction

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ATTACK AREAS at HUE

Figure 6

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within the city, precluded the use of artillery, bombs, and napalm, but by late evening on 3 February, all supporting arms restrictions were removed south of the river. The expected relief was not forthcoming, as the combination of close combat and poor weather prevented effective air support. In fact, the fire supporting arm affected most by weather throughout the battle of Hue, was air. Morning and evening fog, intermittent rain, and almost constant overcast curtailed the employment of fighter and reconnaissance aircraft. ^{15/}

As a result of the general adverse meteorological conditions, many of the airstrikes were flown at night, which was the best time for good weather. Night strikes and radar bombing (COMBAT SKYSPOT) characterized a great deal of the air effort with COMBAT SKYSPOT controlling 48 sorties, both Marine and Air Force, which was nearly half of the total strikes flown. Most of the radar-directed bombs fell (Fig. 7) to the west of the city proper. ^{16/}

Despite these limitations on air, ground troops made steady progress, and by 9 February reclaimed south Hue. The enemy had taken heavy losses, but fresh units continued to infiltrate the city. Also, civilians were pressed into service by the enemy, and armed local cadre wearing red arm bands facilitated movements of nonlocal hostiles through the alleys and courtyards of the residential areas. ^{17/}

On 22 February, General Lam, who had first authorized bombing within the Citadel on the 5th, was required to order airstrikes against the Imperial Palace--the "Throne of Kings", as it had become evident further infantry

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assaults would result in prohibitive friendly casualties. After heavy air support, the Vietnamese Black Panther Company successfully assaulted and seized the Imperial Palace on the afternoon of 24 February. The remaining enemy units were soon caught in a vise and quickly eliminated. By 25 February, the Citadel was declared secure and control of the city of Hue was returned to the government of Vietnam. ^{18/}

The entire Marine fighter effort was from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, which flew a total of 48 attack sorties, 40 of which were in close support of ground troops. Fixed-wing aircraft were also utilized for aerial broadcasts directing civilians to places of safety. ^{19/}

The USAF flew a total of 90 strike sorties directly in support of operations at Hue between 2 and 27 February, of which all but one were immediates. The sole preplanned sortie flown on 14 February, was directed on the 6th NVA Regiment Headquarters, two kilometers west of town. Until 10 February, the battle damage assessments by air were generally reported unknown. Air support of troops-in-contact began for the first time on 14 February, and it was then that first reports were received of enemy troops killed by air. Also, destroyed and damaged structures appeared for the first time on that day and were continually reported on virtually every subsequent mission. By the end of February, USAF airstrikes had accounted for 36 enemy KBA and 129 structures, either damaged or destroyed. ^{20/}

The enemy lost more than 5,000 killed and 89 captured. Friendly losses were 140 Marines and U.S. Army troops KIA and 857 WIA, with 384 ARVN KIA and

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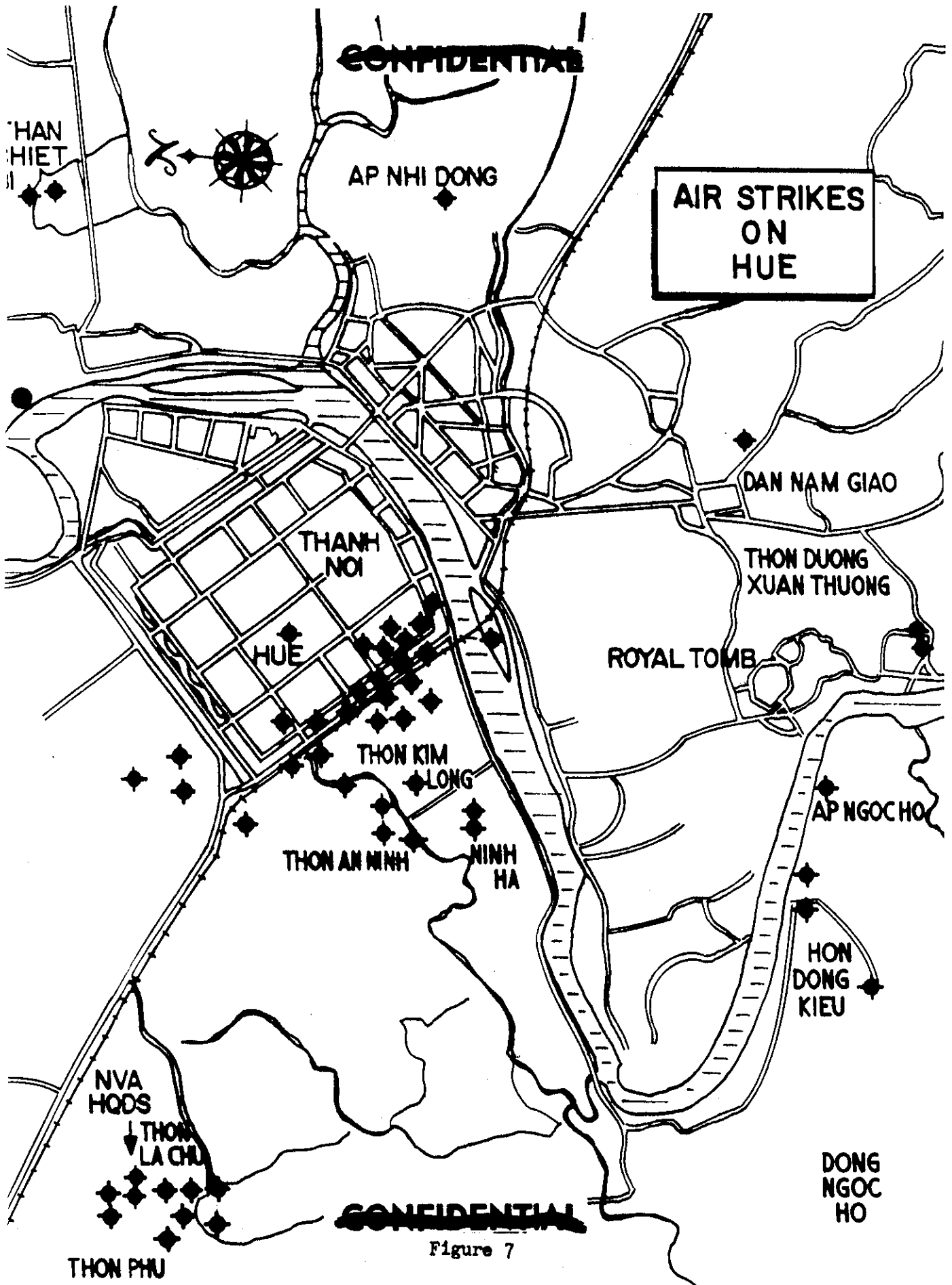


Figure 7

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1,800 WIA. ^{21/}

The following summary of a confiscated enemy document, classified by the enemy as "Absolute Secret", shed some interesting light on the battle for Hue. According to the document, the attack on Hue had been planned as a separate operation to be conducted in March 1968, but the NVA party committee decided to launch the attack during Tet, due to the opportunity of the situation. The assigned Communist forces had 20 days preparation beginning on 7 January 1968, and during this time conducted 26 attack exercises. ^{22/} Their mission was to annihilate the ARVN administrative and intelligence personnel and induce the local population to revolt.

Prior to the attack, civilians were infiltrated into the city to test the government's efficiency of control, while at the same time a movement to assassinate local officials (outside Hue) and ambush vehicles on the Da Nang--Hue highway was begun. The enemy also occupied a number of district seats and conducted fire attacks on Phu Bai Airfield. After overrunning the Free World Forces installations, Communist forces occupied Hue for 25 days. During this period, they staged several demonstrations with the participation of a large number of city dwellers. On 18 February, they set up a "Coalition Front for Peace".

Communist reports of their withdrawal from Hue leave out their losses or details of troop deployment; however, numbers involved and timing approximately coincided with the U.S. Marine After Action Report. Communist claims of Free World Forces killed or captured, plus equipment destroyed were, as

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usual, greatly exaggerated. For example, they claimed 250 aircraft were burned and 52 "warships" were destroyed.

Dalat

Although intelligence indicated that an attack was imminent on Tuyen Duc Province, it was believed the VC were mobilizing their forces for an attack on Duc Trong District Headquarters and not on Dalat. Therefore, there was no general increase in readiness posture. The fact that Dalat had not been assaulted during the entire 22 years of war in Vietnam had undoubtedly lulled the inhabitants into a false sense of security, and at the time of the attack, there was no current area defense plan in existence.^{24/}

The Offensive, which was to last for 11 days, began at 0200 hours on 1 February by an estimated VC company. Shortly afterward, the enemy made coordinated mortar and ground attacks against the Cam Ly Airfield, Sector Headquarters, and an MP villa. A Reaction Force, supported by gunships, was dispatched by the Province Chief. This force prevented any overrun, and by late that day had driven the enemy back to their previously established strong points on the western edge of the city.^{25/}

On 2 February, the 145th VC Battalion assembled in the cemetery, firing into Regional Forces located 500 meters to the southeast. Two airstrikes called in terminated the enemy's desire for action the remainder of that day. Contact was light on the third and fourth days, culminating in a near stalemate as Communist troops retreated to the high ground, thereby bogging down friendly repulsion efforts. At this stage, the VC had six effective fighting companies and the ARVN had seven. On the fifth day, the 23d ARVN

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Ranger Battalion arrived to reinforce the province troops, but positions remained static until 8 February, when intelligence reports indicated that the enemy was conducting limited withdrawal operations. On 9 February, friendly forces conducted a frontal attack, but this, too, was halted, even though repeated air and artillery support was called in. This was the heaviest day of airstrikes as 16 VNAF A-1H sorties and two each F-4C and F-100 sorties were flown. All airstrikes were within city limits. On 10 February, the 11th ARVN Ranger Battalion and the 2d ARVN Ranger Group arrived and joined the fray with the existing force by conducting another frontal assault. Again, gains were limited, though tactical air and artillery saturated the area. A tactical airstrike and heavy artillery were repeated again on the 11th, but the enemy fought a stubborn withdrawal. By the end of the day, most VC forces had withdrawn and only occasional sniper fire was reported throughout the city. On the 12th, a VC base camp, which was being used as an assembly area for the withdrawing enemy, was located and six F-100 sorties struck, destroying 14 structures. ^{26/}

In addition to the 23d ARVN Division Command Post, there were three separate and distinct Tactical Operations Centers (TOCs) in operation. During the Dalat battle, each TOC was responsive to different chains of command, which were: (1) the Mayor of Dalat; (2) the Province Chief; (3) the Superintendent of the Vietnamese Military Academy. Coordination procedures were intricate and complicated. Rarely did one force know what the other was doing. Thus control of air and artillery strikes was difficult and time consuming. ^{27/}

A total of 47 USAF airstrikes were flown in support of the ground forces.

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All strikes were either in or near the city, with a total of 111 enemy KBAs attributable to air, and 122 structures either damaged or destroyed. Even though the battle lasted 11 days, 44 out of the 47 airstrikes were immediates. The three preplanned strikes were scheduled and flown against a VC base camp on 12 February--the day after the city was declared secure. (Fig. 8.)

The first VNAF strike was not flown until 8 February, when three A-1Hs struck the southern edge of the city. The bulk of the VNAF effort came on 9 February, when 16 A-1Hs struck deep within the city limits, approximately due east of the airfield. (Fig. 8.) A total of 27 VNAF strike sorties were flown, all well within the city limits; they were accredited with 10 KBA and 76 structures, either destroyed or damaged. At the time of the attack on Dalat, a VNAF A-1H squadron at Nha Trang, the closest VNAF base in II Corps, was in the process of converting to another aircraft. This may have contributed to their low sortie rate, particularly in the opening phase. ^{28/}

I. Corps

Commencing at 0230 hours on 31 January, and extending for a period of 48 hours, 13 of 16 province capitals in IV Corps were struck by the communists. Some of these were occupied. On 3 February, Cao Lin, one of the remaining cities, was mortared in the early morning, but no ground attack occurred. At 1000 hours the same day, ARVN units trapped an estimated 300-man force on the outskirts of the city. Airstrikes and gunships were called in and an estimated 200 VC were killed. ^{29/}

A determined effort was made by the VC to take Can Tho city and Can Tho Airfield, with heavy fighting raging there until 5 February, when the VC

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