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M0073

0002

**SECRET**

377th COMBAT SUPPORT GROUP  
HISTORY  
VOLUME 1  
NARRATIVE

1 JANUARY 1968  
TO  
31 MARCH 1968

**SECRET**

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0004

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JANUARY - MARCH 1968

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANT EVENT</u>
31 January 68	0340	Base perimeter attacked at 051 gate by hostile forces and eventually penetrated. Perimeter re-established at 1125 hours, 31 January 1968 but sporadic ground fighting in the area continued through 3 February 1968.
18 February 68	0100	Base hit with approximately 60 rounds of 122mm rockets, widely patterned.
18 February 68	1220	Base hit, 2 rounds 122mm rocket fire.
18 February 68	1523	Base hit, 2 rounds 122mm rocket fire.

18 February 68	1755	Base hit, 1 round 122mm rocket fire.
19 February 68	0157	Base hit, 2 rounds 122mm rocket fire.
19 February 68	0340	Base hit, 4 rounds 122mm rocket fire.
19 February 68	0602	Base hit, 4 rounds 122mm rocket fire.
20 February 68	1210	Base hit, 1 round 122mm rocket fire.
20 February 68	1853	Base hit, 1 round 122mm rocket fire.
21 February 68	1205	Base hit, 1 round 122mm rocket fire.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANT EVENT</u>
21 February 68	1632	Base hit, 3 rounds, 122mm rocket fire.
24 February 68	0440	Base hit, 15 rounds, 122 mm rocket fire.
24 February 68	0448	Base hit, 5 rounds, 122mm rocket fire.
27 February 68	0130	Base hit, 4 rounds, 122mm rocket fire.
27 February 68	0520	Base hit, 2 rounds, 122mm rocket fire.
01 March 68	0503	Base hit, 16 rounds, 122mm rocket fire.
21 March 68	0117	Base hit, 10 rounds, 75mm

recoilless rifle.

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RVN. 377th Security Police Squadron provides an aerospace security program to three satellite locations, Trang Sup, Vung Tau, and Phu Quac. The Central Base Personnel Office services 88 units that are geographically separated from Tan Son Nhut. Saigon Area Procurement Office, conduct supplies, equipment and non-personal services support of Tan Son Nhut, Binh Thuy, 7AF, DCS SAM, 196th Communications Group, 1876 Communications Squadron and DO SO OSI.

(C) All additional deviation from a normal Base Operation is the fact that Tan Son Nhut Air Base is owned by the Vietnamese Government and is controlled by a Vietnamese Base Commander as well as a USAF Commander. This results in the requirement for elaborate coordination and liaison on such matters as use of real estate, base entry, security, etc.

Disaster Preparedness Plan

(U) As a result of the Tet Aggression, the Base Disaster Preparedness Plan dated 1 September 1967 was revised to include procedures to cover lessons learned. Basically, the major changes included a system for base wide recall of personnel residing off base in both government leased and private housing. A new annex, manpower and personnel, was added to provide base support personnel in the event local national civilian employees were not allowed on base. An area warden plan was devised to provide control of personnel and weapons in specified geographical locations.

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377 SECURITY POLICE SQUADRON  
BSP  
1 April 1968

377th COMBAT SUPPORT GROUP  
POLICE SQUADRON DIVISION  
BSP

UNIT  
ADMINISTRATION  
BSPX

ADMINISTRATIVE  
SECURITY BRANCH  
BSPA

OPERATIONS  
BRANCH  
BSPO

REPORTS AND ANALYSIS SECTION	PASS AND REGISTRATION SECTION	CLASSIFIED MANAGEMENT SECTION	PERSONNEL SECURITY SECTION	WEAPONS SYSTEM SECURITY SECTION	TRAINING SECTION	ARMAMENT AND EQUIPMENT SECTION	LAW ENFORCEMENT SECTION
				BSPOW	BSPOT	BPOA	BSPOL

	SECURITY FLIGHT UNITS	SENTRY DOGS UNITS	*FLIGHT UNITS	INVESTIGATION UNITS
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\* Includes L.N. Supervisors and Customs functions

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COMMANDER, 377 SECURITY POLICE SQUADRON DIVISION - BSP 1 April 1968

Provides staff supervision management and direction of the base weapon system security, facilities and resource protection, classification management, information and personnel security, law enforcement and correction program. Insures that all Security Police activities are operated in accordance with procedures as outlined in the 125, 205, and 207 series AF directives.

## SECURITY POLICE UNIT ADMINISTRATION - BSPX

Responsible for all unit administration activities essential to personnel and unit administration. Includes unit administrative personnel, First Sergeant and the Squadron Section Commander. Accomplishes all action incident to billeting, health, welfare and morale.

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ADMINISTRATIVE SECURITY BRANCH - BSPA

1 April 1968

Assists units and staff agencies in resolving problems involving security infractions or violations, classification and safeguarding of classified material, and the conduct of quarterly security inspections as required by AFR 205-1. Supervises issuance of identification media.

### REPORTS AND ANALYSIS SECTION

Prepares AF-X3 reports, security police activities reports, serious incident reports and briefings and charts related to the command status of discipline. Reviews and monitors OSI reports disseminated to interested commanders.

### PASS AND REGISTRATION SECTION



Controls, processes and issues identification media and restricted area passes; administers and controls the registration of privately owned vehicles, firearms, and other designated controlled items.

#### CLASSIFIED MANAGEMENT SECTION

Responsible for administering and monitoring and effective classification management program to include providing assistance and guidance in establish classification requirements, proper application of classification categories and methods for marking and identification.

#### PERSONNEL SECURITY SECTION

Responsible for administering and enforcing prescribed procedures for safeguarding classified material and information; providing assistance, guidance and advisement to base activities relative to security classification management, conducting required surveys or inspections, and maintaining liaison with OSI. Responsible for processing personnel security clearances and maintaining appropriate files as prescribed by AFR 205-6.

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OPERATIONS BRANCH - BSPO

1 April

1968

Exercise direction and control of the Law Enforcement, Armament, Training, and Weapon System Security Sections. Which have a combined UMD strength of 8 officers, 871 airmen and 229 civilians. Allocates and controls personnel assignments among sections incumbent upon this unit. Monitors actions of sections to insure compliance with 125, 205, and 207 series AF directives.

#### WEAPONS SYSTEM SECURITY SECTION - BSPOW

Provides overall control and operations of the Aerospace Weapon System Security Program through employment of Central Security Control (CSC),

Security Alert Teams (SATs), and aircraft area security forces. Responsible for supervision, control and operation of the sentry dog kennel. Includes supervisor, kennel master and dog handlers. Maintains, inspects and monitors detached security forces at Vung Tau, Trang Sup and Phuc Quoc as directed by Hq 7th Air Force.

#### TRAINING SECTION - BSPOA

Develops, implements and administers training programs to insure initial and continual proficiency of all assigned security police personnel. Monitors and supervises the training of all non-security police augmentation personnel in firearms proficiency and emergency defense plans.

#### ARMAMENT AND EQUIPMENT SECTION - BSPOA

Operates the unit gun-equipment room, receives, stores and issues weapons, munitions, radios and field equipment; inspects, cleans and maintains weapons and equipment that are in storage.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT SECTION- BSPOL

Provides overall control and operation of the base military law enforcement program which consists of military law enforcement, resource and facilities protection, traffic control, and investigations and correction. Includes supervisory and administrative personnel. Processes all US personnel and personal property entering designated points of embarkation in accordance with AFR 75-25 and other applicable directives.

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### APPENDIX 1 TO ANNEX 1      377 CSC OPLAN 355-68 SECURITY POLICE QUICK REACTION MOBILITY FORCE

1. Objective: To provide a Quick Reaction Mobility Force (QRMF) of Security Policemen from the 377th Combat Support Group. The QRMF must be capable of deploying immediately upon the order of the Commander, Seventh Air Force, to any location within the Seventh Air Force area of responsibility. The QRMF must be equipped to operate without additional support or resupply for a minimum of three days.

In addition to the individual equipment of each member of the element, three type I Conex containers, containing the following items, have been chained to pallets and pre-positioned in the Intransit Ammunition Storage Area on the north end of runway (Inactive) one-eight.

- (1) 1 Battery Charger with 4 spare batteries.
- (2) 500 ea Hand Held Slap Flares.
- (3) 5,000 rounds of M-60 Ammunition.

2. COMPOSITION:

a. The QRMF will consist of twenty-five (25) qualified Security Policemen, fully trained and proficient with all assigned weapons. A minimum of three qualified Security Police Non-commissioned Officers (77170) will be included in the element. Normally, this will consist of one (1) Technical and two (2) Staff Sergeants.

b. Members of the QRMF will deploy with three M-60 machine guns, eight portable radios, and the following individual equipment:

- (1) 1 ea M-16 Rifle with basic load
- (2) 1 ea 38 Cal Revolver with basic load
- (3) 1 ea XM-148 Grenade Launcher
- (4) 1 ea Helmet, Foul weather clothing.
- (5) 3 ea Fatigue Uniforms, sufficient underwear, socks, toilet articles, insect repellent.
- (6) 1 ea Flak Jacket.

- (4) 5,000 rounds of M-16 Ammunition.
- (5) 1,000 rounds of 38 Ca. Ammunition.
- (6) 300 rounds of 40 mm Grenades (HE).
- (7) 240 packs Individual "C" Rations.

3. RESPONSIBILITY:

a. The Commander, Seventh Air Force will direct implementation of this plan.

b. Airlift transportation will be provided by the 315th Air Division upon request of Seventh Air Force.

c. Resupply will be provided by the host base and/or designated Seventh Air Force Installations.

d. The Chief, Security Police will insure personnel and

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INSTALLATION HISTORY AND UNITS ASSIGNED

History

Tan Son Nhut Air Base is located on the northern most outskirts of Saigon, the capital city of the Republic of Vietnam. The base was originally constructed in 1939 by the French Army, putting into use a laterite runway. This original runway was expanded during the Japanese occupation in 1944 and further expanded when the French reorganized the Air Base in 1946. In 1955 the Republic of Vietnam took over complete control and maintained the base until 1961 at which time the base was put under the joint control of the Republic of Vietnam and the United States Overseas Mission (USOM). The USOM/AID Program provided the major development of concrete runways, taxiways, and aprons. The base is really Tan Son Nhut Airport managed by the Director of Civil Aeronautics GVN. The primary GVN occupant is the Vietnamese Air Force which has its headquarters here and the 33rd Air Wing. The first USAF unit to occupy Tan Son Nhut Air Base was the 2nd Air Division which was expanded to the 7th Air Force in 1965.

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377th SECURITY POLICE SQUADRON  
JANUARY - MARCH 1968

Assigned to:  
377th COMBAT SECURITY GROUP  
SEVENTH AIR FORCE  
PACIFIC AIR FORCES

Stationed at:  
Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Republic of Vietnam

Original Signed

DAVID C. WOLLSTADT  
CAPT, USAF  
USAF  
Historian

Original Signed

BILLY J. CARTER  
LT COLONEL,  
Commander

Copy No. 3

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## SECURITY STATEMENT

This volume is classified CONFIDENTIAL to conform to the classification of the information in the source documents. It will be handled in accordance with the provisions of AFR 205-1, as amended.

This volume contains information affecting the national defense of the United States within the meaning of the Espionage Laws (Title 18, U.S.C., Sections 793 and 794), the transmission or revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

This volume has been placed in downgrading Group 4, which is the highest downgrading group assigned to the information in the source documents. The historian's analysis and consolidation of information from many sources, which individually may have lower downgrade provisions, results in a synthesis which may have wider implications than the material on which it is based. Therefore, individual downgrade instructions for each paragraph are not indicated, and all portions of this volume will be handled under the overall downgrading group.

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## Chapter 1 Mission

(U) The mission of the 377th Security Police Squadron remained essentially unchanged during the period January through March 1968. It was as stated in the 377th Combat Support Group Organization/Mission Chart.

Protect weapon systems, vital facilities, equipment and personnel of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, from saboteurs, espionage, subversion and ground attack as envisioned by 207 series directives. Maintains military law and order, and accomplishes correction, administrative security clearances and industrial security functions as detailed in the 125 and 205 series directives.

(C) In one vital area, however, the responsibilities of the squadron dramatically, if unofficially, increased during the period. During the Viet Cong's TET offensive, the squadron learned that the enemy was both willing and able to launch a large-scale, multi-battalion attack on Tan Son Nhut, in spite of the fact that the threat as outlined in the 207-series directives was from relatively small terrorist-type units. Further and equally significant, the squadron found out that the Vietnamese military personnel assigned sentinel and perimeter defense responsibilities could not be depended on to fulfill those responsibilities. Consequently, the mission of the squadron edged away from protection of U.S. government personnel and property and towards the total, first-line responsibility for defense of Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

### Organization

(U) The only significant change in the squadron's organization was the appointment on Special Orders of Capt David C. Wollstadt as squadron section commander. The change had been planned for several months to relieve the squadron commander, Lt Col Billy J. Carter, of some of his more routine

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and time-consuming paperwork responsibilities, and Col Carter had hoped that it could be made effective immediately upon Capt Wollstadt's arrival in the squadron in early January. However, authority had to be requested through the Seventh Air Force Office of Manpower and Reorganization, and although the request was considered routine, approval was not received until March.

(U) Nevertheless, when the orders were finally published, Col Carter felt that the change was a good one. Routine paperwork required his signature (e.g., personnel actions) was reduced considerably and he found himself that much better able to handle his already-heavy operational responsibilities.

(U) Outside of the squadron section, which included squadron administration and the orderly room, the squadron was divided into two basic operating sections, squadron operations and administrative security. Operations was further broken down into weapons systems security, law enforcement, armory and training sections. The squadron also had small detachments at Phu Quoc, Vung Tau and Trang Sup, RVN, in support of physical security requirements of Detachment 1, 619th Tactical control Squadron; the 535th Tactical Airlift Squadron; and Detachment 7, 619 TCS, respectively.

#### Administration

(U) A problem was noted during the period concerning Airman Performance Reports when several APR shells were returned to the orderly room by the operations section, which stated that no one had supervised the ratee long enough to render a report. Up to that point, the orderly room had relied on the CBPO to initiate the APR shells based on an individual's

personnel records, the date of the last APR, that all forms 1098 initial file, etc. The squadron, however, has been lax in initiating local action when supervisors/rating officials changed, and the result in a number of cases was that APR's were not requested until the man had completed his year in RVN and was ready to go home. On several occasions, it was found that an airman's supervisor had changed due to normal rotation or operational requirements, and that the man had never been supervised for the minimum period of 90 days or that his proper rating official had departed without writing an APR.

(U) Several aspects of this problem were considered insoluble. The short tour for personnel in SEA inevitably meant a high turnover rate and thus more frequent supervisory changes that are required elsewhere in the Air Force. The squadron's requirement to support the three remote site detachments on a 90-day TDY basis also increased the turnover rate among supervisors and ratees. It was further considered impractical to fall back on a strengthened suspense system based upon 1098 action, as the CBPO stated it would probably not be able to handle the administrative workload if a new 1098 was submitted every time a man's rating official changed.

(U) Instead, it was decided that the APR situation would have to be more closely monitored from within the squadron, based on normal PCS rotation of supervisors and changes of duty assignments of both supervisors and airmen. This in-squadron monitoring program, established by the first sergeant and the squadron operations superintendent, would, it was felt, adequately supplement the CPBO's existing suspense system and insure that the airmen received the APR's they deserved.

## CHAPTER II PERSONNEL

(U) Personnel manning was considered satisfactory during the January, through March quarter; however, a new manpower study was submitted through Seventh Air Force manpower channels in March, incorporating the lessons learned during the TET offensive and requesting an increased authorization of approximately 450 Security Police personnel.

(U) The unit's assigned strength on 1 January 1968 was 846, including 10 officers 36 technical sergeants and above, 85 staff sergeants and 715 sergeants and airmen. On 31 March, the assigned strength was 854, including 9 officers, 41 technical sergeants and above, 87 staff sergeants and 717 sergeants and airmen. During the period, the average present for duty (PFD) was approximately 804, with the remainder on leave, R&R, hospital, quarters, or TDY status. The number of personnel not present for duty never seriously affected the unit mission.

(U) The squadron training program continued to be successful, particularly in its objective of training newly-assigned personnel in the weapons and tactics employed by Security Police units in Vietnam. Approximately 230 personnel received country-entry training during the period, over half of them in March, when 128 men arrived in the unit. Despite the turnover, the mission capability of the squadron was not significantly affected, as the men were trained promptly and put to work.

(U) The effectiveness of the training section's efforts during January and the preceding months was amply demonstrated during the TET offensive. After the 31 January battle, many personnel in the squadron cited their in-country training as a major factor in enabling them as individual and

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the squadron as a unit to perform as well as they did

(U) Following the 31 January attack, the in-country training program was expanded to include instruction in new, heavier weapons as they were received by the squadron and incorporated into the squadron's defense plans.

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Chapter III  
Operations and Training

The TET Offensive: 31 January 1968

(U) For the 377th Security Police Squadron, the single overriding event of the January - March 1968 historical period was the Viet Cong's massive TET offensive, and, specifically, the multi-battalion attack of Tan Son Nhut Air Base on 31 January. The attack provided the ultimate test for the squadron's response capability--the primary mission objective towards which all previous training had, at least indirectly, been directed. Moreover, after 31 January, most of the squadron's energies were directed towards defining the lessons learned during the battle and attempting to apply them in actual practice.

(C) The attack came without notice, and the size and firepower of the enemy units were without precedence for a major USAF installation in RVN. The squadron had been placed in Security Condition GREY on the morning of 30 January in response to the increase hostile activity during the TET "truce," and General Momyer, the commander of Seventh Air Force, had placed all of his bases in RVN on Security Condition RED at 1730 hours that afternoon as a result of rocket and mortar attacks on a number of other installations the night before. But, except for vague, general reports that the Viet Cong would probably attempt some type of attack on Tan Son Nhut some time before or during the TET holidays, there was no firm indication of the type or size of attack which the Viet Cong could or would launch. Nor was there any firm intelligence concerning

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when or from what direction an attack, if any, was coming.\*

(C) The first such indication that something big was underway came at 0300 hours on 31 January when a report was received at JDOC that the American embassy in Saigon was under attack. A few moments later, the Vietnamese Joint General Staff compound was also reported under attack, and at 0320 hours, the first rounds fell on the east end of Tan Son Nhut near the POL area. But it wasn't until 0333 hours--when mortar and rocket rounds started to hit the west end near the 051 gate and Viet Cong troops appeared from the tree line--that the 377th Security Police Squadron knew from where the major attack was coming or had any indication concerning it's size.

(C) (Post-attack intelligence indicated that at least seven Viet Cong battalions, augmented by North Vietnamese army (NVA) elements, were involved in the attack on Tan Son Nhut, with the total number of hostile troops estimated at 2,500 men. The majority of these troops--three reinforced battalions with an estimated strength of 500 men each--attacked the west end of the base near the 051 gate, while other hostile units ranging from squad- to battalion-size applied pressure at eight other points around the base perimeter simultaneously.)

(C) The squadron responded immediately with all the resources at its command. The men had been placed on five-minute alert when the squadron

went into Condition RED earlier in the evening, and when the first rounds

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\* (C) Since the attack, several agencies have claimed that their intelligence reports predicted the attack or that they provided the information on which General Momyer based his decision to place Seventh Air Force in Condition RED. The historian cannot disprove these claims; however, no such predictions or information reached the 377th Security Police Squadron through intelligence or any other channels.

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landed near the POL area, the quick reaction teams were readied for immediate deployment.

(C) The major problem, of course, was on the west end of the base. At approximately 0335 hours, a sapper unit (later identified as an element of the C-10 Sapper Battalion) blew a hole in the perimeter fence between the 051 Bunker and the 051 gate, and the Viet Cong started pouring through the breach.\* The bunker returned the enemy fire, but was shortly silenced by two direct hits from RPG2 or RPG7 rockets, which killed four of the five Security Policemen inside (the only 377th Security Police Squadron KIAs during the battle.)

(C) The squadron's Central Security Control (CSC) immediately dispatched the four-man sector Security Alert Team (SAT), two three-man CSC Standard SATs, and the 13-man reserve SAT to the scene. The sector SAT was the first to arrive. It took a position just south and east of the 051 Bunker and poured fire into the attacking forces until it was forced to withdraw for lack of ammunition and to permit helicopter gunship strikes in the area. It then took a new position approximately 150 yards to the south, received a new supply of ammunition, and resumed firing into the advancing enemy forces. The other SATs were unable to reach the bunker because of the intense hostile fire. One standard SAT and the RSAT took positions approximately 200 yards southeast of the bunker and opened fire. The other SAT, coming in from the north,

guarded against flanking movements on the north side of the penetration area.

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\* (C) The MACV Rules of Engagement had prevented the Security Policemen in the 051 Bunker from firing on the sapper unit, which had driven up to the fence line in a Lambretta scooter-taxi, as the unit had not exhibited hostile intent prior to exploding its Bangalore torpedoes.

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(C) Next, three 13-man QRTs and one platoon of Task Force 35 (30-man platoons of Army augmentees under the operational control of the 377th Security Police Squadron) were dispatched to the west end to form a blocking force directly east of the advancing Viet Cong penetration force, and another Task Force 35 platoon was sent to bolster the south-east flank. These units formed the main defensive line just east of the western most crossover taxiway north and south of the main runway. They were ordered to return the enemy fire and hold their positions.

(C) By this time, an estimated 600 Viet Cong--one reinforced battalion augmented sapper and NVA units--had penetrated through the breach in the perimeter fence. this main assault force was armed with or supported by RPG2 and RPG7 rockets, 81mm mortars, .50 caliber machine guns, hand grenades, automatic weapons, small arms, and other miscellaneous weaponry. Although outnumbered at least four to one and facing superior firepower, the Security Policemen and augmentees maintained steady, well-disciplined fire and blunted the Viet Cong penetration.

(C) Meanwhile, Lt Col Carter, back at JDOC, deployed the other QRTs to reinforce perimeter defenses in the northwest, north, northeast, east, Main Gate, Gate 2, and south sections of the perimeter; held the third



(and last) platoon of Task Force 35 in reserve at CSC in the event of a Viet Cong breakthrough; and worked feverishly with U.S. Army and Air Force counterparts to secure air, artillery, armor, and infantry support for his beleaguered Security Policemen.

(C) Fire support was requested from U.S. Army helicopter light fire teams (LFTs), but clearance was delayed for approximately 45 minutes

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because the LFTs were unable to distinguish between friendly and enemy positions. A platoon of three Vietnamese light tanks arrived at approximately 0500 hours, but within 15 minutes two of them were destroyed by enemy rocket fire and the third was forced to withdraw. The Vietnamese field commander, Major Chieu, was wounded when one of the tanks was hit. At this time, the Vietnamese commander of JDOC, Lt Col Coung, turned over his command to Lt Col Bernard L. Garred Jr., U.S. Senior Advisor to the Tan Son Nhut Sensitive area. A short time before, around 0430 hours, forward air controllers (FACs) reported a very large Viet Cong force in the fields directly west of the 051 Bunker and 051 gate. This was later identified in post-attack intelligence as two reinforced battalions totaling 900-1000 men. At 0523 hours, friendly artillery received clearance and began taking a heavy toll on these forces outside the perimeter fence.

(C) During this period and for the next hour, the battle on the west end of the base was a standoff. The defense forces kept up a constant but well-disciplined fire on the hostile positions, keeping the Viet Cong pinned down and unable to advance. But, although two companies of Vietnamese airborne arrived to reinforce the defense line, the

friendly forces had neither the firepower nor the manpower to counter-attack and drive the attackers off the base.

(C) At approximately 0600-0615 hours, however, the fire from the Viet Cong positions became extremely intense, and the FACs reported that the Viet Cong in the field to the west of the perimeter were starting to advance toward the base. The defensive forces braced themselves, returned the fire, and held their positions.

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(C) About 0630 hours "C" Troop of the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment (3/4 Cav) of the 25th division (less one platoon), which had been placed under the operational control of JDOC, was sighted coming down Highway 1 from the north towards the 051 gate. Although it suffered heavy casualties in an ambush from a row of houses just north and west of the gate, the troop pushed through and hit the Viet Cong on the north flank, distracting their attention from the Security Police main defense line. The defensive forces and particularly the 3/4 Cav unit remained heavily engaged with the enemy forces for the next hour. At approximately 0730 hours, "B" Troop of the 3/4 Cav (plus the remaining platoon of "C" Troop) entered the 055 gate at the northwest tip of the base, sped down the outer perimeter road, and hit the Viet Cong from the north. At this time, the Viet Cong again increased the intensity of their fire, apparently to cover the withdrawal of the units inside the base perimeter.

(C) The pressure somewhat relieved, the 377th Security Police Squadron and the other defensive forces inside the base counterattacked

from the east, driving the Viet Cong off the base, while the 3/4 Cav units continued to press the attack on the north flank. The Security Police and Vietnamese Airborne forces met stiff resistance, particularly on the south part of their counterattack line and from the 051 Bunker, which had been overrun and occupied early in the battle. By 1000 hours, however, most of the Viet Cong had been killed or driven off, except for the pocket of resistance in the 051 Bunker. The bunker was finally neutralized by grenade fire, assaulted, and taken by Security Police forces at 1215 hours.

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(U) Meanwhile, at the Main Gate area, military and civilian workers had begun to arrive on base from their downtown quarters at approximately 0600 hours, but many were caught in a heavy crossfire from Viet Cong sniper positions outside the gate. A team of Security Policemen defending the gate escorted these personnel to the relative safety of the base, often using their bodies to shield the personnel being escorted. They continued escorting personnel in this manner until approximately 0800 hours, when the sniper fire abated. Other Security Policemen escorted ambulances carrying the more seriously wounded battle casualties to Third Field Hospital, and, for the next several days, Security Police escorts accompanied convoys bringing needed supplies to the base.

(C) With the base perimeter resecured and declared free of living enemy, the 377th Security Police Squadron turned to the problem of bolstering perimeter defenses. During the remainder of the 31st and

for the next two days, hostile fire of varying intensity was directed onto the base from Viet Cong positions, particularly on the north, northeast, and east section of the perimeter. Although half the squadron had been up 24 hours or more and the rest had slept but a few hours before the attack, the entire unit remained on duty the night of the 31st in response to reports of renewed attacks. Not until the morning of 1 February were some of the men able to snatch a few hours sleep. Their vigilance paid off, however, as Security Police forces, along with other defensive reinforcements, returned all hostile fire and prevented additional penetrations and large-scale attacks.

(C) Post-attack intelligence revealed that the attack on Tan Son

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Nhut was part of an overall Viet Cong plan to overrun the Seventh Air Force and MACV headquarters and to deprive the Saigon area of fixed-wing airlift support (by taking Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and the Saigon racetrack) and, at a minimum, to force Vietnamese and U.S. acceptance of a political "solution" to the war. The quick response, professionalism, and courage of the 377th Security Police Squadron which was the lone defensive ground force during the early, critical hours of the battle foiled the most important element of this plan.

(C) The protection of priority resources on base during the attack was almost absolute. A few Viet Cong penetrated as far as the edge of the Whiskey 8 crossover taxiway, where their bodies were found, but the area of penetration was contained to the original area directly east of the breach. No other penetrations were made of the perimeter defenses.

A few minor, low priority structures were damaged or destroyed by stray bullets or rocket rounds. Thirteen aircraft received very minor damage from stray small arms rounds.

(C) In all, 962+ Viet Cong bodies were counted as a result of the battle. On the west end alone 157 bodies were counted inside the perimeter fence and 267 outside the fence. The body count outside the west perimeter fence had to be discontinued before it was half completed due to more pressing operational requirements, however, and the official estimate for the outside area was 500+. Thus, the squadron felt that 1,200 Viet Cong bodies was a more accurate figure.

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(U) The squadron's performance on 31 January and its contribution to the Free world effort in Vietnam attracted considerable attention with both Air Force and U.S. Army channels. General William M. Momyer, commander of Seventh Air Force, praised the squadron in a letter dated 2 February:

Although I realize that minor enemy activity is still continuing, I wish to extend my utmost appreciation for the splendid manner in which the 377th Security Police and others involved in defense of Tan Son Nhut blunted and held the enemy force during the early phases of the 31 January 1968 attack. The successful accomplishment of this mission without question resulted in the saving of many lives and vital resources.

The many individual acts of leadership and heroism exhibited along with the professional conduct of all personnel involved are in the highest tradition of the USAF. Please extend my personal appreciation and gratitude to other defense force personnel for an exceptional job.

And in March, the commanding officer of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), General William C. Westmoreland, included the following comments in a rare letter of commendation in praise of the unit:

The recent Communist TET Offensive posed a significant challenge to the responsiveness and effectiveness of all our forces in Vietnam. The men of the 377th Security Police Squadron accepted this challenge and helped to frustrate the enemy's intentions. Their defense of Tan Son Nhut Air Base and eventual defeat of the attacking enemy force has reflected the highest traditions of the Air Force. The men of this unit can take pride in the contributions they have made to the allied efforts in Southeast Asia.

Please convey my congratulations to the men of the 377th Security Police Squadron for a job well done.

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#### Lessons Learned

(U) The scope and intensity of the Viet Cong's TET Offensive---and particularly the attacks in the Saigon/Tan Son Nhut area---came as a shock to many people, not the least of which were the men responsible for the defense of Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The 377th Security Police Squadron, as the U.S. agency with first-line responsibility in this area, began compiling the "lessons learned" almost before the battle was over and, in effect, began to rewrite the "book" on the defense of the base.

(C) The basic lesson of the TET Offensive was the obvious fact that the Viet Cong was both able and willing to launch a large-scale, multi-battalion attack on the largest and politically most important military installation in Vietnam---and that he came uncomfortably close to overrunning it. Previously, the Saigon/Tan Son Nhut area had been considered at least relatively secure, and it had been assumed that friendly ground units (i.e., Vietnamese or U.S. infantry) would provide adequate security against any large-scale hostile troop movements well outside the base perimeter. Consequently, it was assumed that the security responsibilities of the 377th Security Police squadron (as well as other Security Police squadrons in SEA) would be limited to protection of personnel and resources against sabotage and attacks of small units no larger than battalion size. On 31 January, all of these assumptions became obsolete.

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(U) The first identified requirement in the light of the new threat was for more, better, and heavier weapons and other equipment.

(C) The need for additional weapons was felt to be particularly critical, as the Viet Cong assault battalion which hit the west end was superior to the defense forces not only in numbers but in firepower. The squadron felt it needed weapons at least

comparable to the rockets, mortars, and heavy machine guns used by the Viet Cong on 31 January. Colonel Carter specifically recommended incorporating mortars, recoilless rifles, and anti-armor rockets into the Security Police inventory in SEA for direct support illumination and for destroying reinforced enemy positions. On the morning of the battle, the 377th Security Police Squadron had nothing heavy enough to destroy the bunker which had been overrun and occupied by hostile forces.

(C) Colonel Carter also pointed to actual or potential problem areas in transportation and communications. Security Police reaction forces and their weapons had been transported to the battlefield on open-bed commercial 1½ ton trucks; Colonel Carter felt that armored personnel carriers (APCs) would be more appropriate. Besides providing safety at least against small arms and small-caliber automatic weapons fire, APCs could be utilized for heavy weapons support fire, evacuation of injured from the battlefield and ammunition resupply. The communications require-

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ment for Lt Colonel Carter included a multi-channel radio capability to provide additional channels in the event the enemy was able to penetrate the base at more than one point on the perimeter; back-up communications to guard against the jamming of the standard CSC net; and direct communication with helicopter gunships and other firepower support units.



(C) The new threat of attack from a large hostile force using sophisticated heavy weapons further pointed up the need to engage the enemy as far away from the critical resources as possible--outside the perimeter if possible and at the perimeter fence line if not. Colonel Carter recommended the establishment of a free fire zone/clear area around the base as the ideal solution which, if implemented prior to TET, probably would have prevented the Viet Cong from penetrating the perimeter. Colonel Carter recognized, of course, that such a solution would involve immense difficulties, especially at Tan Son Nhut, and would certainly be considered unfeasible for the more populated areas around the perimeter.

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\* (U) On 7 March, the squadron heard dramatic evidence of the need for back-up communications when both the Security and Base Police radio nets were jammed, probably by a keyed microphone. Although the source of the jamming was probably not hostile, the disruption of the primary communications nets was unsettling, to say the least. See Doc. 5.

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(C) In particular, it was felt that the emphasis on close-in protection of critical resources as directed by 207-series directives, while ideal against individuals or small groups using relatively primitive weapons (i.e., satchel charges), would have

to be reevaluated in light of the new enemy tactics encountered on 31 January.

(C) Security Police training, particularly that received prior to assignment in SEA, was another area which required re-evaluation, according to Colonel Carter. The previous emphasis was geared toward self-defense and small-unit tactics. A shift toward more infantry-type training with emphasis on crew-served and heavy weapons, assault tactics, and deployment procedures was recommended.

(C) The number of casualties and difficulties involved in evacuating them during the 31 January battle indicated as immediate need for combat training for medical personnel and closer liaison between the dispensary and the Security Police squadron. During the battle, most of the casualties had to be evacuated part or all of the way to the dispensary in Security Police Vehicles. It was felt that the problem was twofold--the lack of combat training or experience among the medics, and the unfamiliarity of the medics with the positions of defensive units and the routes of entry to those positions.

(C) A second major "lesson learned" from the TET offensive was the need to maintain constant vigilance and the maximum practical

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response capability, regardless of intelligence indicators. Prior to the 31 January attack, there was no firm intelligence

data available to the 377th Security Police Squadron or other base defense forces indicating enemy plans or movements in the immediate area---much less anything indicating that the Viet Cong were even able to attack in the strength that they did. In fact, intelligence reports the day before TET stated that the maximum force that the Viet Cong could muster for the attack which had been vaguely predicted for before or during the TET holidays was one reinforced battalion.

(C) A third lesson drawn from the 31 January battle was the importance of quick reaction in halting the enemy advance and limiting his area of penetration. The squadron was helped in this respect by the fact that General Momyer had declared Security Condition RED, which placed the men on immediate recall and gave their supervisors the opportunity to organize the quick reaction teams (QRTs). Thus, when the attack came, the squadron was able to deploy the maximum number of personnel in the minimum time and meet the attacking force before it reached the first crossover taxiway. However, if the squadron had been in a normal

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\* (C) After 31 January, the intelligence situation changed markedly. During the remainder of the historical period, the squadron was continually flooded with dire intelligence predictions (still couched in vague terms) of impending Viet Cong attacks ranging in size from several battalions to several divisions. These predictions generally covered a time-frame of five to ten days beginning from one to five days from the publication date.

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(Condition WHITE) defense posture, the additional response time

(probably 5-10 minutes) would have enabled the attacking force to penetrate that much further, and the cost of defending the base would probably have been much greater in terms of both lives and property. In order to provide a more adequate response capability under normal operating conditions, it was recommended that the reserve security alert teams (RSAT), the on-duty immediate response team, be increased from 12 men to 50.

(C) Finally, the battlefield reports of 31 January indicated that the squadron could not afford to rely on Vietnamese personnel in planning for perimeter defense. Generally, the observed performance of the Vietnamese soldiers manning static perimeter defense positions was spotty; specifically, the Vietnamese on the 051 gate just north of the point of penetration failed to fire on the attacking force and apparently deserted their position.

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### Action Taken

(U) Immediately after the 31 January attack, the 377th Security Police Squadron began working on the lessons it had learned, the hard way, on the battlefield. By the end of the historical period, the squadron's defensive capability had increased dramatically. At the end of March, 1968, it was better armed, trained, and organized and, in general, better able to defend Tan Son Nhut Air Base against the type of attack which occurred on 31 January.

(U) In general, the most significant tactical lesson learned was that the enemy must be engaged as far away from priority resources as possible, preferably at the perimeter or beyond, with sufficient force to keep him outside the base. To this end, several major actions were taken.

(C) First, the emphasis in base defense was shifted away from close-in security of priority resources to the concept of total perimeter defense. Recognizing the limited effectiveness of close-in bunkers against the sophisticated heavy weapons known to be possessed by the Viet Cong, many of the interior security posts were eliminated in favor of additional observation towers and defensive perimeter bunkers. Colonel Carter recognized that there were risks inherent in the move if the Viet Cong attempted small-unit or terrorist-type attacks against the aircraft areas. However, he felt that the primary threat to the base and its resources was from large rather than small-scale attacks, and that the increased observation and interdiction capability on the perimeter, combined with remaining interior guardposts, would provide adequate protection to priority resources.

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(C) Second, the squadron's quick response capability was increased fourfold, with four 13-man QRTs on five-minute alert 24 hours a day, as opposed to one 12-man RSAT prior to 31 January. Further, the four QRTs were dispersed to four widely-scattered locations to place them closer to the more vulnerable areas of the perimeter and thus reduce response time. In addition, the dispersal insured that the squadron would obtain a reaction capability in the event of a rocket attack. Each of the four locations had sleeping facilities to reduce the burden on the individual Security Policeman, who pull QRT duty in addition to their normal work schedule.

(C) Third, the Weapons Systems Security section obtained two 90mm recoilless rifles through lateral purchase by Seventh Air Force from the Army; two quad-barrel .50 caliber machine guns (turret-mounted on 2½ ton military trucks) through Vietnamese supply channels; three single-barrel .50 caliber machine guns (mounted on ¾-ton weapons carriers) from the 3/4 and 11th Cavalry Regiments; and a supply of M-74 light anti-armor weapons (LAAWs) to provide the squadron with a heavy weapons capability. With the exception of the LAAWs, which were carried on the SAT vehicles, the weapons were assigned to a newly-created heavy weapons section with Charlie Flight (the night flight). Sufficient teams were trained in the operation of each weapon to insure a heavy weapons response capability at any time during a 24-hour period. In addition, a number of predesignated revetments were being constructed as of 31 March to provide a limited amount of protection to the weapons and vehicles when they respond to a battlefield area.

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(U) Finally, the concept of total perimeter defense was written to include co-manning by Security Police and Vietnamese personnel of defensive bunkers along all but a small portion of the perimeter.

(U) Action was taken in one other 'lessons learned' area, also. The 377th USAF Dispensary, recognizing the need for its medics to be familiar with Security Police defensive positions and the routes of entry thereto, detailed one man per day to ride with a Security Police SAT during the afternoon and evening hours.

The Rocket Attacks: 18 February - 1 March 1968

(C) During the last two weeks of February, Viet Cong forces hit Tan Son Nhut Air Base 17 times with 122mm rockets and 75mm recoilless rifle rounds, with the size of the attacks varying from 60 rounds on 18 February to "harrassment" attacks of one or two rounds.

(U) No one from the 377th Security Police Squadron was killed as a result of the attacks. A few Security Policemen sustained injuries, most of them minor.

(C) The attacks never seriously impaired the squadron's ability to perform its mission. On two occasions rocket explosions knocked out the power at CSC and JDOC, and supervisory personnel had to take over the radio net with their handie-talkie sets, but the security operations never flagged.

(C) Although the rockets basically did not differentiate between Security Policemen and the rest of the base, they did pose one particular problem for the squadron. Throughout the period of the rocket attacks, the 377th Security Police Squadron was in an expanded security status as a result of intelligence reports which indicated the possibility of

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renewed, large-scale attacks (with the estimates of hostile strengths ranging up to 10,000 troops). Shortly after the 18 February attack revealed the enemy's ability to saturate the base with rockets, Colonel Carter became concerned about the effect on the squadron's response capability of a direct hit on the squadron barracks area, where the QRTs were billeted.

(C) The result was a total dispersal of the squadron into sleeping areas at four widely separated areas on the base. The areas were chosen for their proximity to vulnerable sections of the base perimeter and for their ability to offer at least some protection against incoming rockets.

(C) The move was viewed as a necessity by Colonel Carter to insure maximum response capability in the event that a ground attack on the base followed a barrage of rockets and/or mortars. The reaction of the troops was mixed. Although the barracks were much more comfortable, there was no doubt that the dispersed locations offered more safety, both because of their physical layouts and because they were removed from the primary target areas on the base. However, during the period they were dispersed, the men worked 12-hour shifts, which, when the time required for posting was included, gave most of the men barely enough time to work, eat, shower and shave, and get out to their dispersal locations in time for a few hours' sleep. This created a particular burden on the night flight, as their QRT hours came during the day--when it was hot and noisy and difficult enough to sleep anyway.

(U) Efforts were made--and were largely successful--to obtain enough air mattresses so that the men on QRT would be able to sleep with a minimum of discomfort.



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The Continuing Threat

(C) Although there were no further hostile ground penetration attempts after 31 January, the threat of enemy attack remained extremely high through mid-March. As a result, all days off were cancelled until early March, and the operating sections (Law Enforcement and Weapons Systems Security) were kept on two 12-hour shifts until 16 March. Then, when the squadron did revert back to a more 'normal' three-shift schedule, it was felt that certain adjustments were necessary to insure adequate response capability in the light of the enemy's demonstrated capability to attack Tan Son Nhut with a multi-battalion force. Because the hours of greatest threat were those of darkness, the night flight was put on a 10 hour shift, from 2000 hours to 0600 hours, and the two day flights were given seven-hour shifts, 0600-1300 hours and 1300-2000 hours, respectively. The QRTs, however, remained steady at four teams of 13, or a total of 52 men, 24 hours per day. Since the two day flights were each only about half the size of the night flight, this meant that day flight personnel had to pull QRT duty once every three days; night flight personnel, once every six. This schedule was still in effect at the end of the historical period.

(U) There was continual concern within the squadron during the period as to how well the men would hold up under the strain of a continuing high threat, extremely long hours, and little or no time for recreation or the conduct of personal business. The problem was made more serious by the fact that the rest of the base had resumed normal operations within a short time after the 31 January attack--

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including normal working schedules, recreation time, and days off.

(U) Under the circumstances, Colonel Carter felt that the men did remarkably well. The appearance of the troops slacked off, as the time for haircuts and even shaves was limited and the laundry service erratic. But morale in the squadron was the highest it had ever been, and the disciplinary rate, which had never been very high, fell to a new low.

(U) Morale was helped by a number of factors: the constant personal attention of the supervisors to the men and their problems; letters of commendation received from higher echelon commanders and a general attitude of appreciation expressed in various ways by personnel on base; and special arrangements worked out by the orderly room and supervisory personnel to provide shopping and banking hours exclusively for Security Policemen.

(U) Basically, however, it appeared that the men had taken a great deal of pride in themselves and the accomplishments of their squadron, and, being aware of the threat of rockets and/or a ground attack, were more than willing to make the sacrifices necessary to insure an adequate defense posture. In many cases, it appeared that the men were less concerned about the problem than their supervisors.

\* (U) It was interesting to note that the amount of griping within the squadron appeared to be inversely proportional to the airmen's estimates of the seriousness of the threat. Hardly any complaints were heard, for example, for one or two days after a rocket attack.

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Squadron Operations Section

(C) The TET offensive and the lessons learned there resulted in several other major changes in defense planning for Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Specifically, the unexpectedly large size of the Viet Cong forces involved forced defense planners to consider, first, the probability that future attacks on the base would be of comparable or greater dimensions and, second, the resultant possibility that the Security Police defenses might be breached and the base over run. The response to the first consideration was to revise the Aerospace Operations Plan (OPLAN) 207-68 to include augmentation of Security Police defense forces by personnel of the 377th Combat Support Group in the event of a large-scale ground attack. The response to the second was to insure, through another revision to OPLAN 207-68, that all units on the base would be able to arm their personnel on short notice if the base was being over run or was in imminent danger of being over run.\*

(U) Both changes were directed by higher headquarters, and both created problems for the squadron. First, they created an additional workload for the squadron at a time when the other lessons learned from

\* (C) The revisions to OPLAN 207-68 were applicable to the annexes governing Security Conditions RED (Option I) and RED (Option II). The former, according to the plan, is declared when the base is under attack from a known enemy force; the second, when the base is either being over run or is in imminent danger of being over run. In practice, the 377th CSG augmentees would be called out only in the event of a large-scale ground attack, but Condition RED (Option I) does not differentiate between large and small attacks or between rocket and ground attacks. Thus, many occasions might arise when the squadron defense forces or even the entire base might be in Condition RED (Option I) without the augmentees being called out.

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the TET offensive has placed very heavy burdens on supervisory, as well as lower grade, personnel. The basic plan had to be revised; unit plans for recall, deployment, and issuances of weapons had to be reviewed and tested; and exercises had to be conducted to insure that the plans worked as well in practice as they did on paper. As the historical period ended, revision, review, and testing of both sets of plans was being accomplished as expeditiously as possible. In addition, special emphasis had to be placed on training the large number of personnel directly involved in the changes. All of the combat support group augmentees had to be trained in weaponry and tactics, and representatives from each unit on base had to receive a basic course in weapons storage, accountability, and maintenance. Training for both groups was scheduled to start in April.

(U) The second and more basic problem lay in the increased access to weapons by untrained, non-Security Police personnel which was a by-product on both changes. The dangers inherent in the possession and use of weapons by untrained, undisciplined, and poorly-directed personnel was one of the lessons of the TET offensive, and Colonel Carter was very much concerned that this increased access to weaponry might create more problems for the defense forces than it would solve.\*

\* (U) See the After Actions Report, para 12f. On one occasion, several days after the 31 January battle, a firefight actually broke out between the 69th Signal Battalion and the 58th Transportation Company, two U.S. Army tenant units located on the southeast side of the base. The two units, each apparently mistaking the other for a hostile force, used small arms, automatic weapons, and slap flares (one of which misfired and started a grass fire near the 377th USAF Dispensary). Fortunately, there were no casualties from the gunfire.

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in the discussions on implementation of the directives, be urged that the controls on the use of weapons be as strigent as possible.\*

(U) As a result, it was directed that all augumentees deployed under Security Condition RED (Option I, would be under the operational control of the 377th Security Police Squadron commander, and that mass issuance of weapons under Security Condition RED (Option II) would be done only at the direction of the Base Commander, Seventh Air Force.

(U) The shift within the squadron to the concept of total perimeter defense and the TET-learned requirements to heavier weapons, armored personnel carriers. (APC's), and increased QRT capability led to a request through Seventh Air Force inspector general channels for an increase of 447 in the authorized CMD strength, to 1,585\* men. The major deviations from the standard manning schedule were in the aircraft parking areas/ramps and preventive perimeter defense areas (-373.4 and +474.7, respectively), reflecting the basic shift away from close-in protection of resources to preventive defense at the perimeter fence-line. The figure of +474.7 for perimeter defense included 39.1 for 12-hour recoilless rifle, .50 caliber machine gun, and quad-fifty machine gun crews; 108.8 for eight 24-hour APC teams; and 102 for a 30-man quick reaction force. As of 31 March, no word had been received as to whether the request had been approved or whether it was likely to be approved.

\*(U) At Seventh Air Force, Security Police operations comes under the IG area of responsibility.

\*(U) This figure includes a 214-man local national (Chinese Nungs) guard force for off-base billets and storage areas in Saigon.

\*(U) Later reduced by one-half, to four APC teams.

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#### Weapons Security System

(C) With the exceptions of ground operations against the Viet Cong during the TET offensive and the normal day-to-day base security functions, the major efforts of the Weapons Systems Security Section were directed toward implementing the lessons learned from the 31 January battle. As noted above, these included the need for total perimeter defense, heavier weapons, better medical care on the battlefield, better communications, and increased quick reaction capability. In addition, however, the degree of firepower demonstrated by the Viet Cong on 31 January suggested several other jobs that had to be done, notably the strengthening of bunker defenses against enemy anti-armor weapons and the establishment of protected firing positions for the heavy weapons and equipment required as a result of the TET offensive.

(C) The priority for perimeter bunker defenses was a direct result of the 31 January experiences on the west end of the base and the post-TET emphasis on total perimeter defense. During the opening minutes of the 31 January battle, the 051 Bunker, defended by five Security Policemen, was the principal source of resistance to the Viet Cong assault force which had breached the perimeter fence approximately 50 yards to the north and was attempting to penetrate onto the base. Shortly thereafter, two enemy rockets scored direct hits on the bunker, killing four of the occupants and seriously wounding the other. The Viet Cong were then able to overrun

the bunker and later use it to defend against the friendly counter-attack. If the bunker had not fallen, according to Capt Carl B. DeNisio, the Weapons Systems Security officer, the enemy's progress might have been delayed sufficiently for Security Police quick reaction forces to halt the penetration at, or very close, to the fence line. At the very least, the size

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and depth of the enemy's penetration\* would have been significantly reduced.

(C) As a result, Capt DeNisio envisioned the establishment of hardened concrete bunker position reinforced by sandbags and steel plate and further protected on the outside by chain-link fencing, concertina barriers, hand-detonated claymore mines. The objective was to establish defensive positions around the perimeter capable of with-standing TET demonstrated enemy firepower from RPG-2, and RPG-7 rockets and providing the occupants at least minimum protection (e.g., the concertina wire and mines) against a direct, "human wave" assault by ground troops. Thus designed, it was expected that the bunkers would be able to delay even a large Viet Cong force long enough for other Security Police forces-unit and heavy weapons teams --to reach the scene and drive back the attackers.

(U) A key element in the plan was the use of chain-link fencing to protect the front and sides of the bunkers against enemy rocket fire. A U.S. Army CMEC study had indicated that the enemy's RPG-2 and RPG-7 could penetrate up to 90 inches of sandbags. The same study, on the other hand, demonstrated that chain-link fencing effectively neutralized the rockets by causing the fuse to become separated from the warhead (making the rocket a dud) or by prematurely detonating the rocket (resulting in a large explosion and concussion but with very little flack other than the warhead casing.

(C) Chain-link fencing was also a key element in the construction of protected firing positions for the heavy weapons (e.g., the 50 caliber machine guns mounted on 2-ton trucks and 3/4 ton weapons carriers) which

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\* (C) At the maximum, 500-600 men (a reinforced battalion augmented by smaller units in an area 600 yards deep and 300 yards wide.

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were required during February. The squadron had learned on 31 January, that positions and heavy weapons were the primary targets for the Viet Cong rockets and it was the effectiveness of the rockets on the Vietnamese light tanks which had attempted to reinforce the friendly defenses, at the 051 bunker. Thus, in order to employ the newly acquired "big guns" with maximum effectiveness, Captain DeNisio planned to ring the inside of the perimeter with a series of "small defolates" foxhole-type excavations (fortified on the front and sides with sandbag bunkers) large enough for the 2 1/2 ton trucks. In the event of a large ground attack, the weapon-carrying trucks would back into the excavations, leaving little more than the machine gun mounts above the top of the sandbags. To further protect the weapons from the enemy rockets, the chain-link fencing was to be installed around the defoliates on three sides.

(U) The weapons systems security section initiated a rigorous self-help program to start work on the projects--enlisting the aid of Red Horse and civil engineering personnel in excavating the defolates and utilizing detail personnel and some on-duty sentries (on two-man posts) to beef up the sandbag bunkers. Although Captain DeNisio personally felt that the projects should receive "crash" emphasis, he recognized that full implementation of his plans--particularly for hardening the bunkers--would be a long-term



project.

(U) Captain Denisio was particularly anxious to install the chain-link fencing, however. First, the fencing could be installed around existing bunkers and temporary defolates (i.e., prior to the hardening of the bunkers and the sandbagging of the defolates), with a minimum of heavy construction work. Second, the fencing was designed to provide protection

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against a direct rocket hit, which was felt to be the principle threat to the bunker positions and heavy weapons. At the end of the historical period, Captain DeNisio was in the process of acquiring the fencing material.

#### Law Enforcement.

(U) A snafu in vehicle registration and problems created by the TET offensive were the principal areas of concern in the Law Enforcement section during the January-March historical period. The routine functions of law enforcement, customs, pass and registration, and administration reflected little change from the preceding historical period, except that curfew violations dropped off by approximately fifty per cent--presumably due to the sharp reduction in off-base travel during the weeks after TET.

(C) The vehicle registration problem, which culminated in the wholesale impounding of U.S. military and civilian vehicles by Vietnamese Officials, provided a constant challenge to the ingenuity and patience of the law enforcement section during the month of January. At issue was the Vietnamese government requirement that all vehicles have current, 1968 regis-

tration plates--and an arbitrary decision to ignore U.S. vehicles which did not. The problem was compounded by the apparent inefficiency of the Vietnamese government in processing registration requests and by a relatively small but still significant number of American drivers who had painted Vietnamese registration numbers on their vehicles to avoid the inconvenience of actually registering their POV's.

(C) According to Capt. Frederick J. Roder, the law enforcement operations officer, the problem resulted from a number of factors. He said the first notification of the requirement for 1968 registration plates was apparently published by the Vietnamese in October 1967. However, through a coordination of U.S. Embassy inaction, inertia on the part of U.S. personnel, poor

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communications, the complex variety of the organizations involved, and the extensive bureaucracy of the Vietnamese and its inability to cope with a great influx of registration requests, the changeover of vehicle registration plates was only sporadically implemented as of early January.

(C) Then, with virtually no warning, the Vietnamese National Police began to impound U.S. vehicles, both military and civilian. This impounding process was arbitrary, capricious, and conducted without regard to military rank on an on-again, off-again basis. The net effect was monumental harassment for U.S. forces personnel in the Saigon/Tan son Nhut area, and untold accounts of U.S. Military and civilian manhours were wasted attempting to get "stays of execution" in order to accomplish liaison with the various agencies involved, to locate and release vehicles, to accomplish registrations, etc.

(U) Several actions were taken in an attempt to alleviate the problem areas. In January the law enforcement section completed a new Tan Son Nhut regulation 125-1 to prescribe procedures and insure better control for

registration, re-registration, and de-registration of all privately-owned vehicles on the base. Then, when the National Police began impounding vehicles, a twofold approach was made. For military vehicles, the U.S. Embassy negotiated an agreement with the government of Vietnam to the effect that no U.S. military vehicle bearing visible military registration markings in accordance with the appropriate service tech in order would have to be registered. In the case of civilian vehicles, a joint task force processed applications on a rush basis, either through personal applications or by means of name lists submitted by the various major agencies involved in the Saigon/Tan Son Nhut area, including a list from Tan Son Nhut prepared by the 377th Security Police Squadron Law Enforcement Section.

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(U) The TET offensive posed two particular problems\* for the law enforcement sections getting Vietnamese employees of U.S. military units and contractors on base to permit resumption of normal operations, and establishing defense plans for the USAF off-base billets in the Saigon/Cholon area.

(U) The first of these problems--which was caused by the fact that the Vietnamese base commander, Major Chieu, had closed the base to Vietnamese civilian employees during the 31 January Battle--was compounded by several factors. First, USAF authorities had no direct say in what would be allowed on base, as the base was owned by the Vietnamese Air Force and not by the U.S. Air Force. Second, Major Chieu insisted on personally controlling the pass system and refused to delegate any substantial portion of his authority in this area. Third, he was reluctant to issue passes to Vietnamese civilians because of the possibility that they might be Viet Cong or VC fellow travelers.

(U) Through extensive daily discussions between Major Chieu, Colonel Carter, Captain Roder, and other officials, a gradual approach was adopted for authorizing limited numbers of key local national employees on base to permit operation of essential services. Thus, on 5 February, one hundred

percent of six critical categories--sewage workers, hospital support workers, crash and fire workers, security interpreters, cooks, and emergency crew--were permitted back on base. Then, as the threat eased, secretaries, clerks, and other workers were readmitted in increasing numbers. Although the approved list reverted back to the six critical categories on 17 and 18 February because of intelligence reports and an incident on base, normal operations were fully resumed by 24 February.

(U) During the early stages of the program, it was stipulated that the local national civilians would be under close supervision at all times.

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The ratio was determined to be one supervisor for ten employees.

(U) The problem of establishing defenses for the off-base billets fell to the supervisors of the squadron's 215-man local national Chinese Nung Guard Forces and resulted in intensive planning and logistical efforts during February and March.

(U) Prior to 31 January, the downtown billets simply were not prepared to cope with any sort of large-scale hostile action within Saigon. The threat within the city itself was felt to be from isolated acts of terrorists or sabotage, and the billets and their occupants were prepared--or, more correctly, not prepared--accordingly. The TET offensive, with its widespread fighting in Saigon itself, found the billets virtually defenseless except for the sustained valor of most of the members of the Nung force.

(U) The first response to the problem was to require all USAF leased billets to have a written defense plan, to establish procedures for protection

of personnel and to insure an adequate supply of weapons, ammunition, food, water, and first aid supplies to sustain the occupants for a three-day period. The Nung Guard Force supervisors were tasked with advising the senior occupant of each billets on his respective defense plan and to make security inspection of weapons and supply storage areas for the billets.

(U) In addition, sweeping changes were made in the organization of the Nung guard section. The four 377th Security Police Squadron supervisors were moved from the squadron area on base to a new downtown villa, where a 24-hour command post for all USAF leased billets was established. All guard posts were reevaluated, and many positions were moved to afford better protection and control of the billets. All posts were supplemented with more sandbags, and many bunkers were completely rebuilt. The Nungs themselves

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received carbines in addition to their shot guns, and a new training program was instituted to include expanded and emergency security operating procedures.

#### Administrative Security

(U) The Administrative Security Section continued to perform its many routine duties in support of the 377th Combat Support Group's security programs. Quarterly meetings were conducted for unit security officers and censors, and 15 staff visits were made to weapons storage facilities on base. Only minor discrepancies were noted.

(U) On 22 March 1968, a Resources Protection Committee meeting was held in the 377th Combat Support Group Conference room as required quarterly by AFR 125-37, PACAF Supplement 3. Inadequate storage facilities on Tan Son

Nhut Air Base were blamed for excessive loss by pilferage or carelessness. Recommendations were made for lights to be installed in open areas where supplies and equipment were being stored.

(U) A total of 19 Office of Special Investigaiton (OSI) investigations were requested and 30 Serious Incident Reports (SIR's) were submitted during the January-March period. Seventeen OSI investigations and 47 SIR's were closed out by the end of the quarter. The cases covered a wide range of offenses, with loss/theft of government weapons and blackmarket activities heading the list. The breakdown of the cases opened and closed during the period were as follows:

<u>Month</u>	<u>Cases Opened (Number)</u>	<u>Cases Closed (Number)</u>
January	Blackmarket Activities (6)	Blackmarket Activities (2)
	Loss/Theft Gov't Wpns (2)	Loss/Theft Gov't Wpns (2)
	Vehicle Accident Fatality (1)	Narcotics (6)
	Theft of Gov't Vehicle (1)	Theft of Gov't Vehicle (2)
	Aggravated Assault (1)	Sex Offense (1)
	Pay & Allowance Matter (1)	Theft of Gov't Property (4)

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<u>Month</u>	<u>Cases Opened (Number)</u>	<u>Cases Closed (Number)</u>
February	Blackmarket Activity (2)	Blackmarket Activity (1)
	Loss/Theft Gov't Wpns (8)	Loss/Theft Gov't Wpns (6)
	Theft Gov't Property (1)	Theft Gov't Property (2)
	Postal Violation (2)	Sex Offense (1)
March	Narcotics (2)	Blackmarket Activity (3)
	Sex Offensives (2)	Loss/Theft Gov't Wpns (3)
	Loss/Theft Gov't Wpn (2)	Theft of Gov't Vehicles (2)
	Theft Gov't Vehicles (1)	Aggravated Assault (2)
	Postal Violation (1)	Theft of Gov't Property (1)

(U) Some 2,409 personnel security clearance actions were handled during the quarter, including 55 personnel security investigations requested, 146

final security clearances granted, 41 interim clearances were granted, and 2,110 access reviews completed.

(U) The backlog of personnel security investigations forwarded from losing commands was resolved on 15 February 1968. Definite follow-up actions initiated to identify the subjects unit of assignment eliminated this problem area.

(U) The quarterly security officers meeting was held on 27 January. Included in the meeting was briefing on AFR 205-57 with an OSI agent as guest speaker. A review of AFR 205-1 as supplemented was covered followed by a question and answer session to clarify new requirements.

(U) New security inspection checklists were developed in order to simplify and improve the Administrative Security Staff Assistance Program.

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#### CHAPTER IV

#### MAINTENANCE AND SUPPLY

(U) The support capability of the armory and vehicle maintenance section was severely tested during the TET offensive. Both sections passed with flying colors.

#### ARMORY

(C) The armory, like the rest of the squadron, was hampered in its efforts by the fact that its resources had been determined in accordance with the pre-TET concept of the Security Police mission in SEA--i.e., to defend government resources and personnel against small unit or terrorist type attacks. Thus, when the Viet Cong attacked the base in multi-battalion force on 31 January, the armory found itself woefully understocked. The "three-day supply" of M16 ammunition was exhausted by the fierce fighting on the west end in less than two hours, and the ratio of two batteries (i.e., one spare) per radio proved inadequate to handle the heavy traffic and round-the-clock usage during the battle and the days following.

(U) In spite of the difficulties, the section kept the troops supplied with ammunition and communications throughout the high threat period. The armory NCOIC, TSgt Robert L Landis, sent a team out to the ammunition dump to get an initial resupply and requested and obtained more ammunition from other bases. Then, as the battle was in progress, he supervised armory personnel and augmentees in loading magazines with some 500,000 rounds.

(U) The battery problem was temporarily solved by conservation measures directed by the armory. All spare batteries were called in,

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and replacement batteries were handed out on a one-for-one basis, with the turn-in batteries immediately plugged into the recharging board. Shortly after TET, a request was made to Seventh Air Force to increase the ratio of batteries to radios to 2.5 (1.5 spares) to one.

#### Vehicle Maintenance

(U) The squadron's vehicle maintenance section, or "Scout" section (named after the principal vehicle serviced, the M151 "Scout" jeep), provided 100 per cent maintenance of the vehicle fleet during the 31



January battle and the ensuing high threat period. Despite round-the-clock use under combat conditions, all vehicles were kept on the road during the entire period. One vehicle was repaired by Scout personnel during the firefight on the west end, and the longest down time for any vehicle was three hours for motor repairs and a new clutch.

(U) The section was also active in the implementation of the lessons learned. It acquired two new weapons carriers and nine 2 1/2 ton military trucks on hand receipt from U.S. Army units. The weapons carriers and three of the duce-and-a-halves were employed to mount newly-acquired .50 caliber machine guns. In addition, the section turned in six old M151 jeeps and received 13 new ones from the base motor pool.

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## CHAPTER V

### FACILITIES

(U) The squadron's living quarters remained satisfactory during the period, with minor maintenance problems remaining common place. The fence around the barracks area, which was supposed to have been started in January, was initially delayed pending the installation of

prefabricated concrete bunkers, was a casualty of the TET offensive. Although sandbag bunkers were placed around the barracks in response to hostile rocket attacks during February, the squadron was still awaiting construction of the fence at the end of the historical period.

(U) The squadron also felt the squeeze of the MACV-directed Project MOOSE (Move Out of Saigon Expeditiously) during January, when the 377th Combat Support Group directed that two barracks in the squadron's 1300 area be made available to the 377th USAF Dispensary. The move, which involved approximately one-fourth of the squadron in all, was planned to maintain to the extent possible the squadron policy of billeting NCO's, flights, and sections together. In the process, the squadron was forced to give up its "transient" area for newly-arrived personnel and to scatter the few remaining unoccupied bunks throughout the barracks area. Despite considerable grumbling from men who had to move their personal belongings for the second or third or fourth time in a matter of months, the move went off without a hitch.

(U) Installation of appliances and plumbing fixtures in the 1300 area "porter camp" or laundrateria was completed during the period. However, no sooner was the facility ready for operation than the 377th Services Squadron announced that it had been denied authority to hire personnel

to operate it. As a result, the facility remained idle until the need for laundry services during the aftermath of the TET offensive proved overwhelming. At that time, the first sergeant, CMSgt Andrew J. Vilks, organized a team of detail personnel and gave them the responsibility of running the laundrateria and providing free laundry services for the men. The situation proved extremely satisfactory for approximately two

weeks, until the detail men were ordered to report to squadron operations for the in-country training course.

(U) Then, the squadron had to make a decision: to close the facility, to permit the men to use the washing machines and dryers on their own without supervision, to task the operating sections of the squadron with providing Security Police personnel on detail to run the laundry, or to find some other means of keeping the facility open and functioning.

(U) CMSgt Vilk felt that the first three alternatives were unacceptable. The first would have left the squadron without means for taking care of the troops' need for laundry services, which was particularly critical after TET. The second would have left the machinery to the mercy of 800 men, and CMSgt Vilk said that the equipment wouldn't last very long under such a set-up. The third was also out of the question, as the consensus was that the squadron needed trained Security Policemen more in the field than in a laundry room.

(U) Consequently, CMSgt Vilk turned over the equipment and building on a temporary basis to Vietnamese MSgt Son, who had previously operated a laundry/tailor concession for the squadron behind the Orderly Room, in return for a fifty percent reduction in the price list

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for everything except fatigue uniforms. MSgt Son further agreed to continue his policy of reimbursing personnel for lost or damaged laundry.

(U) At the end of the historical period, MSgt Son was still running the laundry concession, and the services squadron was not optimistic about getting authorization for local national personnel to take over the facilities as a base-operated free laundry.

(U) The problem of helicopters flying directly over the barracks area was not resolved during the January-March historical period. However, after the helicopter LFTs worked out in support of the Security Police ground forces on 31 January, the troops stopped complaining about the noise. As of 31 March, the complaints had not resumed.

## SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

(U) A total of 143 personnel from the squadron was recommended for decorations as a result of their heroism or outstanding achievement during the TET offensive. The breakdown of submissions and the status of the recommendations as of 31 March was as follows:

<u>Medal</u>	<u>Recommended</u>	<u>Approved</u>	<u>Pending</u>	<u>Downgraded</u>
Silver Star	12	12	--	--
Legion of Merit	1	--	1	--
Bronze Star (w/"V" Device)	20	20	--	--
Bronze Star (Achievement)	6	2	--	4
AFCM (Achievement)	104	86	18	--

(U) The processing of recommendations for awards was hectic, to say the least. The operational supervisors were hard pressed during the weeks following TET bolstering the squadron's defensive capabilities and had precious little time to get involved in the awards recommendations. The men, too, were tied down working shifts of 12 hours or more. Thus, in general, the immediate requirement to implement the lessons learned of the 31 January battle and the continued high threat of renewed attacks made the process of collecting the information for awards recommendations a difficult one.

(U) There were other problems, too. The sheer bulk of awards created a very large administrative burden on the squadron, which was finally resolved only by mobilizing all administrative personnel within

the squadron in a week-long, 18-24 hour per day typing marathon. Second, there was considerable confusion over instructions on how to fill out the recommendation forms, particularly in the case of group recommendations for the award of the AFCM to numbers of quick reaction teams. Many of these recommendations had to be rewritten and retyped as often as three times because of conflicting instructions and changing instructions. Third, on several occasions, the work flow was disrupted by unrealistic suspense placed upon the squadron. The net effect was that the established routing would be interrupted, with more effort spent less productively in attempts to meet the suspense. In addition, the handling pressures significantly increased the risk of errors, as less time could be devoted to proof-reading and double-checking for errors of fact on the recommendation forms.

(U) In general, according to Captain Wollstadt, who supervised the project, the process was one of trial and error. No one in the squadron was knowledgeable in the area, and the CBPO was too hard pressed with casualty reporting and other duties to provide effective direction to the squadron's efforts. The end result, however, was gratifying. By the end of the historical period, 120 of the 146 recommendations had been approved, four had been downgraded, and none had been disapproved.

(U) Captain Wollstadt did, however, identify several lessons learned from the experience. If the process had to be repeated, he said he would make the following changes: first, institute a more

orderly and systematic method of collecting information, including, where possible, written statements from personnel on the scene; second, make a greater effort to get specific written recommendations for awards from the supervisors; and third, resist the pressure of premature suspenses, concentrating instead on the orderly and accurate collection of data and a more relaxed and efficient system for processing the paperwork.

(U) Captain Wollstadt also said that, from an administrative standpoint, the 31 January battle demonstrated the need for Air Force adoption of the Combat Infantryman's Badge or an equivalent. The CIB would have been a more appropriate decoration for many of the personnel who received the Air Force Commendation Medal, he said. In addition, the CIB could have easily been awarded to many of the airmen and the squadron who deserved some sort of formal recognition but whose achievement did not quite measure up to the standards of the AFCM.

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## CHAPTER VII

## SUMMARY

(U) The single over-riding event of the January-March historical period was the Viet Cong TET offensive and the multi-battalion attack on Tan Son Nhut. The attack, which was blunted and ultimately beaten off by the 377th Security Police Squadron, simultaneously altered the mission of the squadron, provided the ultimate test for the squadron's capabilities, rewrote the "book" for the Security Police role in SEA, and created the major workload for the remainder of the historical period--defining the lessons learned and applying them in actual practice.

(C) Prior to 31 January, the primary mission of the squadron as stated in 207-series directives, was to protect U.S. government personnel and resources against small-unit and terrorist attacks. After the attack, however, it became clear that, for all practical purposes, the mission had shifted toward the total, first-line responsibility for the defense of the entire base.

(C) There were several reasons for the shift. First, the size and firepower of the attacking force made close-in defensive positions--so effective against small, primitively-armed groups--almost useless. Second, battlefield reports indicated that the Vietnamese military personnel assigned to perimeter defense could not be depended on. Consequently, it became necessary to engage the enemy as far away as possible from key resources--and this meant a squadron responsibility for total perimeter defense.



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(U) The attack itself came without warning and involved approximately 2,500 enemy troops. Some 600 men were in the assault battalion which penetrated the perimeter fences and fought inside the base. Another 900-1,000 waited in reserve in the fields to the west of the base until 0630 hours, then they started to move in for a second-wave attack. The other Viet Cong applied pressure to the base perimeter and eight other points simultaneously.

(C) The squadron commander, Lt Col Billy J. Carter, deployed three QRTs, four SATs, and two platoons of Army Task Force 35 to engage the enemy on the west end, and dispatched the other QRTs to various locations around the perimeter to meet the other threats and guard against a second penetration. Although the defensive forces on the west end were both outnumbered and outgunned, the lines held long enough for the 3/4 Cav to arrive and hit the Viet Cong force from the north flank. Shortly after the arrival of the cavalry unit, the Viet Cong apparently attempted to withdraw.

(C) In all, the squadron had four KIA (all from the 051) Bunker which had been overrun. The Viet Cong body count for the battle was 962+ according to official estimates. The Security Police estimate of Viet Cong bodies was around 1,200.

(C) A number of lessons was learned from the 31 January battle-- the importance of quick reaction; the need for heavier weapons, vehicles, and other equipment; the need for back up communications; and the requirement for better medical care under battlefield conditions. Most of these lessons were incorporated into the squadron's defense planning.

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(C) The threat of renewed large-scale attacks led to a beefing up of base defense planning for Security Condition RED (Options I and II). Plans were made to arm 400 augmentees from the 377th Combat Support Group upon declaration of RED (Option I), and General Momyer directed that all units on the base have the capability of arming all of their military personnel under Condition RED (Option II).

(C) In response to the lessons learned, the unit acquired two quad-barrel track-mounted .50 caliber machine guns; three single-barrel .50s; two 90mm recoilless rifles; and a number of light anti-armor weapons (LAAWs), to give the squadron a heavy weapons section. The TET offensive also demonstrated the need for greater protection for the perimeter bunker positions. The weapons systems security officer wanted chain-link fencing to be installed around the bunkers as protection against rockets, but at the end of the period he was still trying to get the fencing material.

(U) The law enforcement section had its hands full with vehicle registration and pass liaison problems during much of the period. A combination of problems in obtaining 1968 Vietnamese registration plates culminated in January in the wholesale impounding of U.S. military and civilian vehicles which did not have the current 1968 plates displayed. Many vehicles were impounded even though the owner had applied for his registration and had been awaiting approval from the Vietnamese government for some time.

(U) The pass liaison problem stemmed from the security implications of permitting large numbers of Vietnamese civilian employees on the base

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after the TET offensive. It was compounded by the cumbersome pass system required by the Vietnamese base commander, and it was a problem because many of the Vietnamese civilians were essential to normal operations on the U.S. side of the base. After lengthy discussions, a gradual system of readmitting the civilians onto the base was agreed upon.

(U) During February and March, extensive changes were made in the defense planning for USAF leased billets in the Saigon/Cholon areas to remedy the many shortcomings revealed by the TET offensive.

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Footnotes

1. 377th Combat Support Group Mission/organization Chart Book.
2. AFM 207-2, para 1b; AFM 207-1, para 7b , 7AF Sup AFM 207-1, para 7a (2).
3. Rpt, "Combat Operations After Actions Report (HCS:MACV J3-32), \* by Lt Col Billy J. Carter, Chief, Security Police, 377 Combat Support Group, 9 March 1966 (hereafter referred to as "After Actions Report, 31 Jan"), para 1 , Doc. 1.
4. See below, pp. 15 ff.
5. Hist 377 Security Police Squadron,
6. Interview, Capt David C. Wollstadt, Historian, with CMSgt Andrew J. Vilks, 1st Sgt, 3 Apr 68.
7. See below, p. 29.
8. Interview, Capt Wollstadt with 1st Lt Gerald E. Inglesbe, Squadron Training Officer, 2 Apr 68.
9. Information in this and the following subsections was derived from the After Actions Report (Doc. 1) and numerous informal interviews with Lt Col Carter and many other supervisory and working personnel with personal knowledge of the 31 January battle and the lessons learned.
10. Interview, Capt Wollstadt with SSgt Billy Palmer, Echo Sector Supervisor, (and Echo Security Alert Team Chief on 31 January), 3 Feb 68.
11. Interview, Capt Wollstadt with Sgt Randal Tarter ( Security Alert Team Leader on 31 January, 3 Feb 68.
12. After Actions Report, 31 Jan, para. 10g, Doc. 2.
13. Change 1 to After Actions Report, 31 Jan, Doc. 1
14. Interview, Capt Wollstadt with Lt Col Carter, 15 Feb 68.
15. Ibid.
16. Ltr, Miss Jessie B. Sager, Secretary to the Director of Civilian Personnel, to the Commander, 377 Security Police Squadron, subj: Letter of Appreciation, 31 Jan 68, Doc. 2.
17. Ltr, Commander, 7AF, to Commander, 377 Combat Support Group, subj: Letter of Appreciation, 2 Feb 68.
18. Ltr, Commander, MACV, to Commander, 7AF, subj: Letter of Commendation, 16 Mar 68 Doc. 3.
19. 7AF, Sup 1, AFM 207-1, para. 7a (2) f.
20. Ltr, 377 Combat Support Group, ( ) to 7AF (10 ), subj: Sanitary Zones, 26 Feb 68. Doc 5.
21. Interview, Capt Wollstadt, with Lt Col Carter, 15 Feb 68.
22. After Actions Report (31 Jan 68), para. 12g; Interview, Capt Wollstadt, with Capt Carl B.

- DeNisio, Weapons Systems Security officer, 2 Apr 68.
23. Information for this section was based on the After Actions Report of 31 Jan, Doc 1 and numerous informal interviews with Lt Col Carter and Capt DeNisio.
  24. Memo, Lt Col Carter, to Col W.D. Brooks, Vice Commander, 377 Combat Support Group, "Defense of Tan Son Nhut, " 23 Mar 68, Doc 6.
  25. See below, pp. 30 ff.
  26. Ltr, Lt Col Carter, to 7AF (IGS), subj: Field Medical Forces to work with Security Police, 13 Mar 68, Doc 7.
  27. Information for this subsection was derived from Rpt, "Combat Operation After Action Report (MACV) J3-32 (K01) (Doc 8), and numerous informal interviews with Lt Col Carter and other members of the 377 Security Police Squadron.

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28. Information for this subsection was derived from numerous informal interviews with Lt Col Carter and squadron personnel.
29. Ltr, Commander, 7AF, to all 7AF Hq and Gp Commanders, subj; Storage and issue of firearms, 14 Feb 68, Doc. 9; Ltr, Lt Col Carter, Subj: Security Alert Augmentation Requirements (Condition Yellow), 13 Mar 68, Doc. 10.
30. Correspondence Staff Summary, Maj Robert W. Hocken, acting Squadron Commander, to Col Farley E. Peebles, Commander, 377 combat Support Group, subj: Integrated Base Defense Plan, 1 Mar 68, Doc. 11; Ltr, Commander, 377 Combat Support Group, to all Assigned, Attached, and Tenant units of TSN, subj: Subj: Security Alert Condition Red - Option II, 24 Feb 68, Doc. 12.
31. Ltr, 377 Combat Support Group (BSP) to 7AF (IGS), subj: 377 Security Police Squadron Manpower Study, n.d.
32. Information for this subsection was derived from numerous interviews with Capt DeNisio.
33. After Actions Report, 31 Jan, Atch 1, para 20.
34. CMEC Technical Intelligence Brief No. 1-68, "Protection of Friendly Bunkers, " n.d.
35. After Actions Report, 31 Jan, Atch 1, para 20.
36. Memo, Capt Frederick J. Reder, Law Enforcement Operations officer, to Capt David C. Wollstadt, Historian, n.d.

37. Note, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Vietnam, to the Embassy of the United States of America, 19 Jan 68, Doc. 13.

38. Correspondence Staff Summary, Lt Col Carter to Col Peebles, subj: Personnel Recovery, 24 Feb 68, Doc. 14.

39. Memo, Capt Reder to Capt Woolstadt, n.d.

40. Op. Cit., pp. 20 - 23.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS 377TH COMBAT SUPPORT GROUP (PACAF)  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96307

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: BSP

SUBJECT: Change #1 to Combat Operations After Actions Report (RCS:  
MACV J3-32) (U) (9 March 1968)

TO: Distribution

The following will be added to the last sentence of paragraph 20,  
Atch #1 of Subject Report:

It was at this point that Lt Col Coung (VNAF) TSNSA Commander  
elected to replace the wounded Major Chieu as the Field Commander  
and turned his command over to Lt Col Bernard L. Garred Jr., U.S.  
Senior Advisor, TSNSA.

FOR THE COMMANDER

**ORIGINAL SIGNED**

BILLY J. CARTER, Lt Col, USAF  
Chief, Security Police

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS 377TH COMBAT SUPPORT GROUP (PACAF)  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96307

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: BSP

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Actions Report (RCS: MACV J-3-32 (U))

TO: 7AF (IGS)

1. (U) Type Operation: Mortar, rocket, automatic/small arms, and ground attacks against Tan Son Nhut Air Base and the Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area.
2. (U) Dates of Operation: 0320 hours, 31 January 1968 through 2100 hours, 31 January 1968. Small arms/automatic weapons fire and probing actions on various parts of the perimeter continued through 9 February 1968.
3. (U) Location: Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, and the adjacent Tan

Son Nhut Sensitive Area. The major ground penetration was centered from the 049 Bunker to the 051 Gate on the west perimeter. Enemy ground penetration attempts were also conducted at O.F.10 (Gate 10, Southeast Perimeter) and MACV Annex (Adjacent to Gate 10).

4. (U) Command and Control Headquarters: Joint Defense Operations Center Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area.

5. (U) Unit commanders Engaged in Operations:

a. Lt Colonel Luu Kim Cuong      Comdr, 33rd VNAF Wing  
(Comdr, TSN Sensitive Area)

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b. Major Phung Van Chieu      Comdr, TSN Sensitive Point  
Dep Comdr, TSN Sensitive Area  
c. Colonel Farley E. Peebles      Comdr, 377th Combat Support Gp  
d. Colonel Luther J. Miller      Senior Advisor AFAT #1, 33rd Wing

GROUP - 4

Downgraded at 3 year intervals

Declassified after 12 years

e. Lt Colonel Bernard L. Garred Jr      Senior Advisor TSN Sensitive Area  
f. Lt Colonel Billy J. Carter      Cmdr, 377th Security Police Sq.  
g. Lt Colonel      Cmdr, MACV Annex  
h.      Cmdr, Armed Helicopter Plt.  
120th Aviation Company

(U) Units Engaged

a. 2nd Services Battalion (ARVN)  
b. 8th Airborne Battalion (ARVN)  
c. 53rd Regional Force Bbattalion (ARVN)  
d. 1st Marine Battalion (ARVN)



- e. 4th Marine Battalion (ARVN)
- f. 377th Security Police Squadron
- g. Task Force 35
- h. Task Force Peter
- i. A Troop/1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment
- j. 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Division
- k. 1st Battalion/18th Infantry, 1st Division
- l. 2nd Battalion/27th Infantry, 25th Division
- m. 2nd Battalion, 327th Regiment, 101st Airborne Division
- n. 1st Battalion, 27th Regiment, 25th Division
- o. 1st Battalion, 327th Regiment, 25th Division
- p. 1 Platoon, Armored Helicopters, 120th Aviation Company
- q. 3 Counter Mortar Radar Sites
- r. Provisional Battle Group (Hong Tong Tay Depot Area)

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- s. 1 Platoon 105 mm ARVN Artillery (TSN) JDOC
- t. 1 Platoon 155 mm ARVN Artillery (Co Loa) JDOC
- u. 1 Composite Rifle Company, 33rd VNAF Wing Defense Control
- v. 1 Tank Platoon, 33rd VNAF Wing Defense Control Group, JDOC
- w. Miscellaneous Rr.F. and P.F. elements throughout TSNSA JDOC
- x. 150 USAF Augmentees to 377th Security Police Squadron (Law enforcement Section for escort of personnel from the Saigon Area.)
- y. VNAF and 7th AF TACC
- z. 1 Battery 105 mm, 25th Infantry Division
- aa. A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Division
- bb. Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area Advisory Team

7. (C) Intelligence.

a. Pre-attack Intelligence

(1) Intelligence reports plus raw information received by JDOC 30 days prior to the attack indicated to this level of command that some kind of enemy action would occur during the TET Holiday Season. The intelligence

estimate of the situation gave the enemy a capability of mounting a large scale rocket or mortar attack plus a ground attack with a strength of not more than a reinforced battalion. A training exercise was written on 24 January 1968 and distributed to the Commanders concerned for appraisal and subsequent implementation on the night of 26-27 January 1968. The exercise was designed to test the capabilities of all security forces assigned to the TSN Sensitive Area. The 051 Gate, considered the most vulnerable point of the perimeter and the anticipated enemy avenue of approach from the Cambodian border was selected as the practice enemy point of penetration. Practice condition YELLOW was initiated at 0025 hours, 27 January 1968. Exercise TET was conducted, including a commanders' critique at 0500 hours at the JDOC Command Post.

(2) The intelligence situation for the days immediately preceding the attack remained relatively unchanged from the normal. There was no significant input of information indicating that any enemy attack on Tan Son

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Nhut was implemented. Intelligence collection agencies identified no significant Change of the location, posture, or strength of the enemy forces in the area.

(3) At 1020 hours, 30 January 1968, the Commander, 377th Security Police Squadron declared Security Alert Condition Grey in effect for his unit in reaction to the increased enemy activity during the TET truce and the decrease of the Vietnamese Defense Force units due to the holidays.

(4) At 1732 hours, 30 January 1968, the 377th Security Police Squadron was placed in Security Alert Condition RED ( Option I ) by order of the Commander, Seventh Air Force. The Joint Defense Operations Center (JDOC) tried to confirm the unilateral Air Force Security Condition RED ( Option I ) through U.S. Army channels with negative results. All forces within the TSNSA remained in Security Alert Condition White except the 377th Security Police Squadron and Task Force 35, which were in Condition RED, and all other TSN Defense Forces which were in Condition YELLOW.

b. Post-attack Intelligence Information: The following information has been collected from numerous intelligence sources, including Seventh Air Force, MACV, and agencies directly supporting the Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area.

(1) The attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base was an integral part of the enemy offensive against the Gia Dinh Province and the government of the Republic of South Vietnam.

(2) It has been asserted that plans for the attack of Tan Son Nhut were formulated and discussed by the Viet Cong cadre as early as 22 December 1967. In subsequent meeting, the attack was planned for the period preceding the TET holidays.

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(3) Intelligence sources reflect that an estimated nine enemy battalions were in the greater Saigon Area, and at least seven of them were involved in the attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The enemy battalions in the greater Saigon area were augmented and supported by approximately twelve identified companies or large size elements of the 5th Division of the North Vietnamese Army.

(4) Although all units involved in the attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base have not been clearly identified, specific actions of the enemy and the designation of the attacking units have been established. The roles of enemy units and their identities are discussed below:

(a) Unidentified elements of the enemy directed automatic weapons fire onto the installation in the direction of the POL Storage Area and the C-130 Parking Area. This fire came from an off base position on the east end

of the airfield near the runway approaches.

(b) Heavy pressure from enemy elements of the C-10 Sapper Battalion and the 2nd Local Force Battalion was exerted on the Joint General Staff Headquarters, located adjacent to the southeast perimeter of the installation, and a subsequent penetration by these units was made through the southeast perimeter fence of JCS.

(c) Heavy small arms fire was directed towards Gate #2 by unconfirmed enemy elements. These elements were probably assigned to the 2nd Local Force Battalion and the C-10 Sapper Battalion.

(d) Enemy elements probably from the 6th Local Force Battalion and the C-10 Sapper Battalion, assaulted the south entry control point of the MACV Annex, approximately 250 meter southeast of the base perimeter fence. This Enemy force is estimated to have been a reinforced company (200+).

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(e) Enemy forces estimated at four reinforced battalions mounted an offense against the west perimeter of Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The units involved and their probable tactical deployment are indicated below. Three principal, battalion-size units were positioned in column at the time.

1. Elements of the C-10 Sapper Battalion approached the fence line via lambretta taxi on National Highway #1. The Sapper elements dismounted the vehicle and detonated what is believed to have been a Bangalore Torpedo on the fence line. The explosion opened a section of the outer perimeter fence, and the breach was used continuously by the enemy forces for entry onto the installation. The same elements of the C-10 Sapper Battalion remained with the initial assault force and penetrated the perimeter. The staging area of the sapper element was in the vicinity of Phu Cuong Village, approximately

fifteen Kilometers north of Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

(2) The 267th Viet Cong Battalion (Main Force) composed of approximately 25 per cent NVA, was the lead battalion and the major assault force in the penetration of the west perimeter. This battalion, like all of the attacking battalions, had a strength of 450 to 500 men. Members of this unit made the deepest penetration into the installation. Its staging area was approximately six Kilometers south of Duc Hoa village approximately eighteen Kilometers west of the base.

(3) The 16th Battalion, (Viet Cong Main Force) AKA D-16 (NVA), was the second unit in line of the assaulting forces. Numerous KIA from this unit were identified inside and immediately outside the perimeter fence. It is probable that this battalion was co-located with or at least in close proximity to the 267th Battalion identified in paragraph (a) above, since the delineation

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of their lines could not be clearly identified, and their dead were co-mingled. The greatest porportion of this unit was NVA.

4. The 269th Viet Cong Battalion (Main Force) was the rear unit in line. It's bivouac area prior to the attack was in the immediate area of Duc Hoa. This unit was engaged from its eastern and southern flank by elements of the 253rd Regional Forces Battalion prior to their arrival at the perimeter fence.

5. The 90th Battalion of the 1st NVA (Cover Number KB-604) Regiment was located in the VINATEXCO factory, northwest of the breached

perimeter fence. This battalion had 12 mortar positions to the immediate north, west and south of the factory and probably rendered support fire to the assault forces often referred to by interrogated prisoners. This unit sustained 100(+) KIA primarily during the air attack on the factory during the day of 31 January 1968. It has been reported by Vietnamese intelligence sources that among the many casualties in the factory there were 7 NVA pilots and 15 NVA aircraft technicians.

6. Supporting elements of these battalions or elements of other unidentified battalions provided supporting artillery fire for the attacking hostile ground forces.

8. (C) Security Police Status:

a. The total Security Police assigned strength at the time of the hostilities was 890 personnel. Of this total, 75 personnel, or eight percent of the assigned strength, were TDY, R&R, hospital, or emergency leave status or awaiting completion of in-country training. (The TDY personnel included approximately fifty men assigned to three detachments at remote sites.)

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Present for duty (PFD) strength was 815 personnel, 56 percent (457) of which were physically on post at the time of the Attack. As a result of being placed on RED Alert at 1730 hours, 30 January 1968, eight-13 man Quick Reaction Force was formed, equipped, and readied for, immediate response in the event of attack. This totaled 104 men, or 13 per cent of the PFD strength. The 262 remaining Security Police Personnel, or 32 per cent of the PFD were armed and billeted in the squadron barracks for immediate recall.

b. Upon implementation of Condition RED (Option 1), three platoons of

U.S. Army personnel (Task Force 35) were alerted and placed on five-minute standby status as augmentation reserve forces for the 377th Security Police Squadron. these platoons, composed of 30 men each, were immediately placed under the operational control of the Commander, 377th Security Police Squadron, in accordance with published and approved base defense plans.

c. In accordance with existing procedures, the squadron was divided into two flights. The night flight, which was on duty at the time of the attack, consisted of two officers and 446 airmen. Manning was as follows:

(1) Security Flight

(a) Supervision

<u>1.</u> Flight Commander (1st Lt)	1
<u>2.</u> Assistant Flight Commander	1
<u>3.</u> Joint Defense Operations Center (Liaison and Alternate CSC)	3
<u>4.</u> Communicator/Plotter and Clerks	4
<u>5.</u> CSC Standard SATs (2)	6
	<hr/>
	15

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(a) Alpha Sector

<u>1.</u> Sector NCOIC	1
<u>2.</u> M-16 Bunkers	23
<u>3.</u> Tower guard	12
<u>4.</u> Special Posts (Entry Controllers)	14
<u>5.</u> SATs (2)	6
<u>6.</u> MLR M-60 Bunkers (2)	4

	60
(b) Bravo Sector	
<u>1.</u> Sector NCOIC	1
<u>2.</u> M-16 Bunkers	7
<u>3.</u> Tower guard	6
<u>4.</u> Area Guards and Entry Controllers	24
<u>5.</u> SATs (2)	9
<u>6.</u> MLR M-60 Bunkers (4)	8
	55
(d) Charlie Sector	
<u>1.</u> Sector NCOIC	1
<u>2.</u> M-16 Bunkers	9
<u>3.</u> Special Posts and Entry Controllers	17
<u>4.</u> SATs (3)	6
<u>5.</u> M-60 Bunkers	2
	35
(e) Delta Sector	
<u>1.</u> Sector NCOIC	1
<u>2.</u> Entry Controllers and Revetment Guards	27
<u>3.</u> M-16 Bunkers	15
<u>4.</u> M-60 Bunkers	8
<u>5.</u> SATs (2)	6
	57

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(f). Echo Sector	
<u>1.</u> Sector NCOIC	01
<u>2.</u> 051 Bunker	05
<u>3.</u> Tower Guards	05
<u>4.</u> M-16 Bunkers	12
<u>5.</u> Revetment, Entry Control and Special Posts	14



<u>6.</u> M-60 bunkers	03
<u>7.</u> SATs (2)	<u>07</u>
	47
(g) Foxtrot Sector	
<u>1.</u> Sector NCOIC	01
<u>2.</u> Tower Guards	02
<u>3.</u> M-16 and M-60 Bunkers	04
<u>4.</u> SATs (2)	<u>05</u>
	12
(h) Reserve SAT	<u>12</u>
TOTAL SECURITY FLIGHT	293
(2) K-9 Section	
(a) NCOIC	01
(b) Supervisors	02
(c) Armed Patrol (SAT)	06
(d) Kennel Support	02
(e) Sentry Dog Teams	<u>47</u>
TOTAL K-9 SECTION	58
(3) Law Enforcement Flight	
(a) Flight Commander and Assistant	02
(b) Desk Sergeant, Desk Clerk, and Commo	04
(c) Patrols (4) and Joint Patrols (2)	12
(d) Entry Controllers (Gates)	15
(e) Entry Controllers, Cantonment Areas, and Special Posts	29
(f) Seventh AF Compound Security Guards	12
(g) Quick Reaction Team	13
(h) Customs and Terminal Security	<u>08</u>
TOTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT	101
(4) Others	
(a) Wpns Systems Security Operations Officer	01
(b) Armory	<u>04</u>

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	457
(4) Eight, 13 man Quick Reaction Teams	104
(5) Reserve Security Policemen	254
(6) Three platoons U.S. Army Reserve (Task Force 35),	

30 men each.	90
(7) 2 Platoons, 69th Signal BN, 1 Plt 53rd Trans BN	_____
	905

TOTAL U.S. Security Forces: (377th SPS and Task Force 35 which was under the operational control of the 377th Security Police Sq)

(C) Execution: - See Battle Description, Atch 31.

10. (C) Results:

a. Enemy Losses: The enemy forces sustained 157 KIA (body count) within the base perimeter, and nine POW's were taken by the friendly forces within the same area. Immediately outside the perimeter fence, 267 enemy bodies were counted until the counting action was terminated due to more pressing operational requirements. All of these enemy KIA and POW were probably sustained by the C-10 Sapper Unit, 267th Battalion, 16th Battalion, and the 90th Battalion all of which were identified in paragraph 7b(4)(e) above. The 269th battalion all of which were identified in paragraph 7b(4)(e) above, which was in ground contact with the 53rd Regional Force Battalion with supporting Light Fire Team dispatched to their area by JDOC, suffered 286 KIA (US-confirmed V.C. body count). Friendly elements (2nd Services Battalion and Task Force Peter) operation in the O.F. 10 (Gate 10) area accounted for 82+ enemy dead (body count). The total enemy body count, including the 170+ KIA referred to in para 7b(4)(e) above, was 962+.

b. Friendly Casualties:

<u>U.S. Forces</u>	<u>Vietnamese Forces</u>
<u>KIA</u>	<u>KIA</u>
USAF - 4 (Security Police)	VNAF - 5
U.S. Army - 19	ARVN/RF - 27
<u>WIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>
USAF - 11 (Security Police)	VNAF - 12
U.S. Army - 75	ARVN/RF - 67

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d. Aircraft Damage:

U.S. Aircraft:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Lightly Damaged</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>	<u>Total</u>
AC-47 (USAF)	9	0	9
C-47 (USAF)	1	0	1
C-54 (USAF)	1	0	1
C-117 (USN)	2	0	2

VNAF: None damaged or destroyed

e. Structural Damage:

- (1) 4 Conexes of paint burned (Total loss)
- (2) 1 Trailer Van burned (Total loss)
- (3) 1 Trailer house burned (Total loss)
- (4) 1 Shed roof damaged (Repairable)
- (5) Approximately 400 ft of electrical power cable to a communications complex was damaged by a grass fire (Repairable)
- (6) Approximately 50 perimeter lights (Repairable)

f. Runway Damage: A 3' x 1' x 3" hole on the edge of the runway was inflicted by ordnance impact. The runway remained operational and the damage was repaired the same day.

g. Enemy Ordnance Collection:

- (1) The following ordnance was collected on the installation:
  - (a) 22 VC booby traps (locally fabricated)
  - (b) 8 VC DHB claymore mines
  - (c) 12 VC DH 10 claymore mines
  - (d) 37 Chicom B40 rocket mortars

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- (g) 103 Chicom RKC-3TC grenades
- (h) 95 VC stick grenades
- (i) 40 VC home made grenades
- (j) 13 VC plastic explosive charges
- (k) 142 Chicom TNT blocks
- (l) 17 VC demo kits - satchel charges
- (m) 12000 rds Chicom 7.62 intermediate ammo
- (n) 2000 rds Chicom 7.62 rimmed ammo
- (o) 5 US 81mm mortars, HE
- (p) 45 US M26 grenades
- (q) 15 US 81mm mortars, illuminating
- (r) 65 US 40mm grenades
- (s) 19 claymore mines
- (t) 5 US 57mm recoilless rifle rds
- (u) 47 rds US 50 cal ammo

(2) USAF Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) units, collecting ordnance off the installation in the immediate vicinity of the west perimeter fence, detonated a pile of enemy ordnance estimated to have a high explosive yield of approximately 100 pounds.

11. (C) Follow-up Action: Periodic small arms fire, harassment fire, and enemy movement around the installation continued through to the rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base 18 February 1968. On 10 separate occasions in the four days following the perimeter penetration, Security Alert Teams (SATs) of this organization made direct contact with enemy positions firing small arms and automatic weapons onto the installation. Two engagements resulted in secondary explosions of the enemy positions. Friendly forces

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operating outside the installation made frequent contacts with the enemy near the base. These contacts varied in size, but were all part of the total enemy offensive on Tan Son Nhut and the Saigon area. As of 23 February 1968, 5,519 enemy were KIA (body count) in the greater Saigon area. Sweeping, clearing, resecuring operations by friendly forces are in effect to this date (4 March 19??) The actions of the enemy clearly substantiate the contention that they have no intention of withdrawing from the area and allowing the installation to revert to its previously secure status. This evaluation is further supported by the fact that post-attack intelligence revealed that the Viet Cong attack forces had no plan for withdrawal of their units.

12. (C) Lessons Learned: The concept that Tan Son Nhut Air Base can be penetrated only by small sapper units and that the enemy has the capability to launch only small scale operations in the Tan Son Nhut vicinity became obsolete with the 31 January 1968 attack and the TET Offensive, and a new type of enemy threat was encountered. A major re-evaluation of present base defense procedures and principles has become an immediate necessity.

a. Security Police personnel and augmentees (TF-35) were well-supervised and well-trained in fire control and discipline and in basic tactics, but were neither equipped nor trained well enough to effectively counter a regiment-size enemy assault. Consideration should be given to Base Security Police receiving more infantry type training prior to assignment in Southeast Asia. Emphasis should be placed on crew served and heavy weapons, assault tactics, and deployment procedures. Existing Air Force training in the ZI and in Southeast Asia is not sufficient to enable Security Police forces to effectively counter forces of this size, equipped as they were.

b. Current concepts of base defense and protection of USAF resources as established by higher headquarters' directives should be reviewed. In our opinion too much emphasis is placed on the close-in protection of resources. With the weapons available to the enemy, close-in guards are useless. Security forces must be moved from the revetments and other restricted

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area to the perimeter, where they can effectively engage the enemy. Further we must have the capability to respond with properly equipped reaction force in conjunction with this, the existing defense alignment of the installation must be re-evaluated and changed in light of the new enemy tactics encountered.

c. Reaction forces were able to respond quickly and halt the enemy advance. This was primarily due to the base defense posture at the time of the attack. Had the Security condition been anything other than RED (Option I) or YELLOW, reaction forces would have had to contain the enemy further inside the interior of the base, probably at much greater loss in lives and USAF resources. It is recommended that a larger standby reaction force be utilized in place of the 12 man Reserve Security Alert Team (RSAT). A fifty man reaction force properly equipped with the same immediate response capability as RSAT would more realistically enable Security Police personnel to halt the enemy at an acceptable distance from priority resources.

d. A free fire zone/clear area must be established around the perimeter of the base. If free fire zones/clear areas had been established the enemy would not have had easy access to the perimeter fence and much of the small arms activity would not have taken place. These zones would also have prevented the enemy from setting up crew served weapon positions and ammunition supply areas adjacent to the base perimeter. Recommend that the free fire zone be extended at least 1,000 meters around the perimeter.

e. Medical personnel should be more readily available to the Security Police. Their training, manning and employment should be such that they would be capable of immediate support to the base defense operation. Entry of medical personnel into the affected area and subsequent evacuation of wounded became an acute problem during the battle. If medical personnel are to continue to be employed in this theater of operation, independent of base defense forces, they must establish and maintain a close liaison with

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Security Police to insure that they are fully aware of the positioning of all units and routes of entry into all areas. In addition, medical personnel must receive sufficient combat training to enable them to effectively perform under hostile fire.

f. A more stringent control of weapons issue to non-defensive force personnel is immediately required. Many of these personnel hampered the Security Police effort and on some occasions were nearly mistaken for hostile forces. Personnel should be instructed to take cover, and weapons should not be issued until Security Condition RED (Option II) is declared.

g. It has been determined from battlefield reports that at the point of penetration some personnel of the 2nd Services Battalion (ARVN) deserted their static defense posts. Reasons for the desertion have not been established, But an investigation is being conducted by the Vietnamese authorities. From these reports, it is apparent that there is need for closer coordination between Vietnamese and U.S. Forces involved in the combined defense of an installation. All indications point to an absolute need for the co-manning of defensive positions throughout the perimeter.

h. Local intelligence data available to the base defense forces was entirely void of information pertinent to enemy plans and movements in the immediate area. Defense force personnel must assume that future intelligence reports have questionable validity. They must maintain a posture that will render them totally prepared for an attack at any time, regardless of intelligence indicators.

i. The most significant lesson learned from the attack, and the one which requires the most immediate attention, is the need for more and better equipment. Heavier weapons are urgently needed to effectively combat penetrating forces.

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(1) XM-148 Grenade Launchers proved to be difficult to operate under combat conditions. Their use is extremely limited during the hours of darkness as their design requires a special sighting device which is useless during darkness. Recommend we consider bringing M-79 Grenade Launchers back into the Air Force inventory, and its wide variety of ordnance (HE illumination, canister, white phosphorous, etc.) be obtained for maximum utilization. As an alternate solution, recommend the sighting mechanism for the XM-148 be corrected immediately to allow for effective night-time employment.

(2) Mortars should be considered for direct support illumination and for direct HE fire against attacking ground forces and enemy support fire positions.

(3) Recoilless rifles would have been of great assistance in destroying positions adjacent to West perimeter and inside the 051 Bunker. The counter attack would have been started much earlier and completed at less cost to friendly forces if reaction forces had been able to suppress and destroy enemy crew-served positions.

(4) Some type of rocket launcher is a must. The Army has in its inventory a light anti-tank weapon (LAW) which is considered ideal for destroying reinforced enemy positions. The LAW could be carried as part of a Security Alert Team's equipment. The weapon is easily operated and the launcher is disposable after use. Its incorporation into the Security Police inventory would be an immediate and noteworthy improvement.

(5) In conjunction with the need for heavier weapons and increased fire power, the safe transportation of this equipment and personnel is a must. Armored personnel carriers (APCs) are considered the most appropriate vehicle for this transportation. These vehicles can be utilized for transportation to the affected area, heavy weapons support fire, and evacuation of injured.



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Although neither this nor any other vehicle will provide total safety for the personnel, it will provide protection from small arms and small caliber automatic weapons fire.

(6) It was evident during the attack that the present communication employed by Security Police personnel was completely unsatisfactory. There is a strong need for more powerful portable units, able to receive all units involved in the defense operation. This would alleviate the problems of units cutting each other out because they did not receive other units transmitting. Power sources which can sustain operational requirements over an extended period of time are necessary for these radio units. Had the installation been subjected to more than one penetration, multi-channel (More than two) radios would have been required to successfully contain and destroy the attacking forces.

(7) Direct communications with supporting units (LFTs, AC-47s, Flare Ships, etc.) is an immediate requirement. This capability is essential for effective direct control of supporting units on the scene by in-place Security Police supervisory personnel. During the initial phases of the battle, requests for and direction of specific support fire had to be relayed from on-scene positions through Security Police radio channels to JDOC, which relayed the requests and directions to the supporting units. The resulting time lag made the supporting fire less effective than it would have been if direct communications had been available.

j. The above lessons learned of course apply to operations in SEA. We do not intend to imply that these recommendations would apply Air Force wide.

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( This page is unclassified )

(U) Security Classification: This report is classified Confidential NOFORN because it reflects detailed information relative to damage of U.S. resources resulting from enemy attack and describes counter measures employed by free world forces in response to enemy actions. Reproduction of this document in whole or in part by recipients is authorized on an as needed basis.

FOR THE COMMANDER

**ORIGINAL SIGNED**

BILLY J. CARTER, Lt Col, USAF 2 Atch  
Chief, Security Police 1. Battle Description  
2. Glossary

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**CONFIDENTIAL/NOFORN**BATTLE DESCRIPTION

1. On the nights of 30-31 January 1968, all security forces were in condition YELLOW with the exception of the 377th Security Police Squadron, which was in Condition RED.
2. At approximately 2100 hours, 30 January 1968, the 53rd Airfield Security Battalion (RF) received intelligence information from JDOC that approximately 80 Viet Cong were moving west to east at the vicinity of the village of Xom Go Mayh coordinates XS754964. The battalion immediately organized a twenty man patrol and moved on a large sweep from coordinates XS774939 to XS776934 to XS763946. The patrol then moved to XS773948 and set up an ambush (Approximately 2345 hours). At 0145 hours the patrol, having seen nothing that would indicate the movement of troops, moved to vicinity coordinates XS771950 and then returned to the Battalion CP; two kilometers west of the TSN base perimeter.
3. At 0300 hours, JDOC was informed that the US Embassy and the Saigon Radio Station were under attack. At 0305 hours JDOC was notified that the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) Compound was under attack. Condition RED was put into effect and all commanders reported to JDOC. At approximately 0320 hours, the guard in Tower 16 ( ESE corner of the installation) reported observing small arms fire directed at the POL area from an off base position. A Sector Primary Security Alert Team and a CSC Standard SAT were dispatched. (The situation was monitored on the scene by the Operations Officer and the Flight Commander) Quick Reaction Teams

(QRT's) and Task Force 35 (Army Reserve Augmentation Forces) were briefed and dispatch to pre-designated rendezvous points.

4. At approximately 0320 hours, Gate #2, ( ESE perimeter of the base near

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J.G.S.) reported small arms fire into their location from off base positions. A Sector SAT was dispatched.

5. At approximately 0327 hours, a Security Alert Team reported that heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire was being received off the east perimeter and directed at the POL area. (This report was received at JDOC from both U.S. and VN guard positions).

6. At approximately 0330 hours, 31 January 1968 the guards on the northern bunker of 53rd RF BN compound gave the alarm that several hundred men were moving west to east approximately 400 meters north of the CP. Approximately five minutes later, the guards reported hearing the sound of automatic weapons fire from the direction of the airfield. At approximately 0330 hours, Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area placed a helicopter Light Fire Team under the control of the 53rd BN, 3rd Co. The IFT was directed to strafe the area where the enemy troops were concentrated.

7. At approximately 0333 hours, the 051 bunker (E-6, Southwest perimeter fence line) reported that grenades and mortar rounds were being fired towards the western perimeter, but were falling short. A Sector SAT (E-1), a CSC Standard SAT (C-2), and the Reserve Sat (RSAT) were dispatched. (This report was received at JDOC through both U.S. and VN guard positions).

8. At approximately 0334 hours, E-6 reported that he observed approxi-

mately twenty-five individuals east of the first tree line, approximately 100 meters off the west perimeter fence line, directing small arms and automatic weapons fire towards the west perimeter. Fire was returned by static friendly positions and responding units.

9. At approximately 0340 hours, the 051 Bunker reported that they had

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been hit by a mortar or rocket and that mortar or rocket rounds were landing on base. CSC dispatched an ambulance to the 051 Bunker to evacuate the wounded. The ambulance however, was unable to reach the bunker due to the heavy enemy fire.

10. At approximately 0344 hours, the 051 Bunker reported the west perimeter fence was being breached near the 051 Gate (75 meters north of the 051 Bunker) and that enemy forces were coming onto the base. The Echo QRT and two platoons of Task Force 35 were dispatched to the area and deployed as the initial blocking force.

11. At approximately 0345 hours, two additional QRTs were dispatched and deployed along with the Echo QRT and the two platoons of Task Force 35. These units were deployed parallel to and approximately 100 meters north of Taxiway W-6 to preclude further enemy infiltration to the East.

12. At approximately 0347 hours, Echo Sector SAT reported the Echo Main Line of Resistance (MLR) was taking mortars or rockets.

13. At approximately 0355 hours, an explosive round, possibly a 40mm grenade, landed adjacent to the operations building of the 2nd Services Battalion located near Gate #10 (OF 10) approximately 300 meters south of

the POL Storage Area. Within 2 or 3 minutes heavy enemy small arms, automatic weapons fire, and RPG-2 rocket fire was being directed at the friendly positions all along the Gate #10 Area.

14. At approximately 0359 hours, Tower #4, (southwest perimeter fence, fifty meters east of the 051 Gate) reported that hostile forces were mounting an assault south of his tower and that a light fire team was making contact with the enemy in the fields west of the base.

15. At approximately 0410 hours, in the vicinity of coordinates XS783954

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The previously dispatched 53/3 R.F. Company patrol engaged what was then believed to be an enemy platoon. The patrol exchanged fire with the enemy for approximately five minutes and, due to the enemy's obvious effort to surround the unit, they withdrew south approximately 200 meters and called in a LFT for assistance. The LFT strafed the area with MG and rocket fire. A subsequent search of the area revealed 5 VC KIA at the location of the fire-fight and 65 VC KIA (Body count) in the field surrounding the scene. It is believed that this unit was the reinforcing elements for the attack on the airfield. After disengaging with no friendly losses the unit moved back to the Battalion CP for resupply of ammunition.

16. At approximately 0412 hours, CSC contacted the Joint Defense Operations Center (JDOC) for light fire team support on base, but was refused because the enemy forces were too close to friendly positions and the choppers could not distinguish between friendly and hostile positions.

17. At approximately 0415 hours, the 2nd Services Battalion Commander committed one platoon of his reaction forces with two U.S. Advisors to the 051 Gate Area. When the platoon arrived within 100 meters of the 051 Bunker, it began to receive enemy fire from that bunker. A member of the platoon

was dispatched in an attempt to determine whether the bunker was friendly or enemy. The soldier was wounded by small arms from the bunker and the remainder of the platoon immediately engaged the position. The enemy then turned the captured ARVN 57-mm Recoilless Rifle onto the friendly position fired two rounds and injured one U.S. Advisor and one member of the platoon.

18. At approximately 0422 hours, sector SAT (E-1) reported that they were pinned down about twenty meters Southwest of the 051 Bunker by heavy enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire.

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19. Enemy pressure, continued around the entire perimeter with hostile mortar or rocket rounds, small arms and automatic weapons fire, and physical probes at various locations. One QRT and one SAT were deployed at the 055 Gate (Extreme north end of the base) to reinforce ARVN personnel deployed in that area. One QRT and two SATs were deployed at the northeast section of the POL Storage Area in reaction to intensified enemy fire in that area. One QRT was deployed at Gate #1 and Gate #2 (south perimeter of the base and Main Gate Area) in reaction to enemy fire that was being directed into these positions from off-base sites. The third and uncommitted platoon of Task force 35 was held in reserve at JDOC. An additional QRT was held in reserve in the eastern quadrant of the base in support of the heavily engaged units on the east and southeast perimeter. One QRT was deployed in support of ARVN personnel defending the 056 Gate (058 Bunker, northeast (perimeter) which was receiving intense enemy fire from off-base positions. One rifle company (Task Force Peter) from MACV Annex was deployed on the southern flank of Gate #10 in response to the ground assault on MACV Annex and Gate #10 that was well in progress.

20. At approximately 0500 hours, Major Chieu (VNAF), the TSNSA Deputy



Commander, arrived at Tango 3 with three light tanks and began firing into the enemy positions near the 051 Gate. Within fifteen minutes, two of three tanks were destroyed by RPG-2 or RPG-7 rocket and the third was forced to withdraw to the east near the Old RMK Area. Major Chieu was wounded by one of the rocket explosions and evacuated.

21. At this point, an estimated reinforced battalion of enemy forces had penetrated the western perimeter and was maneuvering to flank the blocking forces in the area.

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22. At approximately 0515 hours, several units in the blocking positions were running out of ammunition and requests for resupply were made. Re-supply was accomplished by Security Police and Advisory Team personnel. The friendly units continued their intense small arms and automatic weapons fire into the enemy positions, causing heavy enemy casualties.

23. At approximately 0523 hours, TSN artillery received clearance to fire HE rounds into the enemy position west of the perimeter. At this time, 2nd Services Battalion 81mm mortars were also cleared to fire and engage the enemy outside the perimeter fence. The fire of both elements was directed to seal off the enemy penetration from west of highway #1.

24. At approximately 0529 hours, enemy troops were sighted by Tower #1, near the Alpha/Echo Sector line. CSC dispatched a Sector SAT and two QRTs to deploy on a line east and west, north of runway 25L to block any further enemy movement to the north. At this point the enemy had pene-

trated approximately 600 meters into the base in a area approximately 300 meters wide.

25. At approximately 0545 hours, the Senior Advisor Capital Military District advised the Senior Advisor TSNSA that Gen Ware was in command of all U.S. Forces in the CMD. Gen Ware immediately placed C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, under operational control of TSNSA. He further stated that the unit was enroute to assist and would be on the TSN Advisory Team command radio frequency.

26. At approximately 0551 hours, Tower #1 reported friendly units were making contact with enemy positions west of the base.

27. The 53rd R.F. Bn, upon returning to its camp, was advised that several hundred VC were moving west to east approximately 600 to 800 meters north

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of the Bn CP. The order to open fire from both northern CP Bunkers was given.

28. At approximately 0558 hours, two companies of the 8th Vietnamese Airborne Battalion arrived in the area of penetration to reinforce the blocking line and prepare for a counterattack.

29. At approximately 0603 hours, Tower #1 reported some of the enemy were withdrawing through a break in the perimeter fence south of the 051 Gate.

30. At approximately 0624 hours, the entire blocking force was subjected to an intense enemy rocket and mortar barrage.

31. At approximately 0630 hours, C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav (less one

platoon) arrived in the area after fighting its way down Highway #1 from its base camp at Cu Chi, 20 miles NNW of TSN. They were employed in a flanking movement from the north and attacked the enemy assault force just outside the perimeter. This attack enabled the defense with a countering the penetration to mount an internal counterattack.

32. At approximately 0635 hours, the counterattack began with the two companies of Vietnamese Airborne in conjunction with U.S. military units located south, north and east of the enemy positions. The initial drive met fierce resistance after advancing approximately 100 meters and the Base Joint Defense Team was forced to hold and call in more support from artillery and the light fire teams.

33. From approximately 0635 hours to approximately 0730 hours, posts in Alpha (northwest through northeast), Bravo (East) and Foxtrot (South) Sectors reported small arms and automatic weapons fire coming onto the base. The counterattack moved slowly toward the west perimeter as the advancing friendly troops were pinned down frequently by heavy enemy fire.

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34. At approximately 0625 hours, the 53rd R.F. Company reported that a VC Battalion had taken over the village of Tau Phu located at co-ordinates XS793854 and had surrounded the company CP located at XS704928. The 53rd company commander, took a patrol out to check VC positions. He was subsequently killed, and the Viet Cong hung his body in front of the CP and cremated it. At approximately 0645 hours an element of 53rd R.F. Battalion moved out of the CP to the northwestern edge of the village of Ba Que, vicinity XS782946, less the 500 meters SSW of the 051 Bunker, and broke up what is believed to have been a reinforced two-company assault team. (A subsequent search of the area revealed 169 enemy bodies at coordinate XS785954).

35. At approximately 0715 hours, the 53/3 R.F. Company reported being surrounded by a large VC force. Assistance was requested and a LFT was allocated by JDOC. After three passes by the LFT the enemy withdrew northeast. A subsequent search of that area revealed 7 enemy KIA. It is believed that the enemy suffered more losses at this location at this time. Forty VC KIA were found approximately 200 meters north of this location. All had been hidden and stripped of all equipment.

36. At approximately 0730 hours, the remaining platoon of C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, arrived on the scene and was directed to enter the base through the OF 55 Gate and proceed to the OF 51 Gate in order to relieve the pressure on C Troop, which was intensively engaged.

37. At approximately 0725 hours, the defensive lines received a heavy concentration of enemy fire under which the enemy started another assault on the friendly counterattack line. They were unsuccessful. Heavy enemy fire followed this re-assault, which is now believed to have been utilized to cover the withdrawal of their wounded and part of the main force which

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was still inside the perimeter.

38. At approximately 0759 hours, Tower #1 reported mortar rounds were falling onto the southern portion of the Airborne area. This action probably related directly to the purpose mentioned in paragraph 38 above.

39. B Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, plus an artillery battery from the 25th Division arrived at the scene of the battle. They attacked the enemy flank from the north with all units on line just outside of the base perimeter. This action relieved the pressure of the penetration and completely

occupied the enemy exploitation force.

40. During this time, with support from the Cav units and their artillery and constant fire support from Light Fire Teams, the counterattacking forces slowly gained momentum. As a result of this action, Tower #1 reported more enemy were trying to withdraw through the breach in the perimeter fence between the 051 Bunker and 051 Gate.

41. At approximately 0930 hours, the U.S. units on the north flank of the counterattack line successfully occupied the area from just south of the 051 Gate, north along the west perimeter. The units continued to draw small arms, automatic weapons, and rocket fire from the enemy positions just off the west perimeter for several hours.

42. The VN Airborne unit on the south flank of the counterattacking force continued to take heavy casualties and again started falling back. The 051 Bunker, in the possession of the enemy since early in the morning, was directing heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire into the southern flank.

43. At approximately 1000 hours, the Airborne unit withdrew to just north of Tower #3 and set up their defensive positions while the U.S. tanks from the 3/4 Cav and LFT attempted to knock out the 051 Bunker.

44. At approximately 1015 hours, one of the LFTs was reported shot down

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on the west perimeter between the 052 and 052A bunkers. Three LFTs were downed in the vicinity of the west perimeter during the morning battle.

45. At approximately 1210 hours, the 051 Bunker was successfully assaulted and neutralized by 377th Security Police Personnel after several attempts had previously failed. This was the last area inside the base perimeter held by the enemy. During this time, several sweeps were made within the area to the north to insure that no living enemy remained within the perimeter.

46. At approximately 1217 hours, the breach was closed and the perimeter was secured. Hostile fire was received from the enemy positions off the west end of the base for several hours.

47. Throughout the eight-hour battle on the west perimeter, heavy fighting continued at Gate #10 and MACV Annex. At approximately 1300 hours, these other areas were declared secured and a VC body count of 82+ was accredited.

48. At approximately 1400 hours, the 8th Airborne Battalion, (ARVN) the 1st Marine Bn (ARVN), and 4th Marine Battalion (ARVN) were committed by JDOC to attack and clear the depot area of Hong Tong Tay (adjacent to the NNE perimeter fence), which was under siege by heavy Viet Cong forces. The 8th Airborne Battalion was halted in the built up area southeast of Gate #10 approximately 500 meters from the base by intensive enemy fire. The 1st and 4th Marine Battalions continued the attack and secured the VN Armor Compound and the Co Loa Artillery Compound located in the Hong Tang Tay Area. Heavy enemy resistance was encountered which forced the three battalions to set up defensive positions just prior to nightfall.

49. The 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division was placed under the operational control of TSNSA. An attack plan was issued by JDOC

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placing the 3/4 Cav, the 53rd RF Battalion, and the reinforced base perimeter in blocking roles, with the 1/18th Inf Bn attacking the enemy in a north westerly direction. This action was designed to force the enemy's main body to disperse into the blocking forces. The enemy broke contact just before dark. The enemy had withdrawn to the southwest into Ba Que, and toward Phu Tho Hoa. FACs engaged the enemy with artillery fire wherever possible. The

3/4 Cav reported that it was receiving heavy small arms fire at a heavy rate from the VINATEXCO Factory. Clearance for a air strike was obtained and the first strike was conducted by the 33rd VNAF Wing. Subsequent strikes by F-100s resulted in 95% destruction of the factory. Secondary explosions occurred. Over 170 VC body count was accredited and a large weapons cache was located in and around the factory.

50. A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cav, 1st Division, the 2nd Battalion, 27th Regiment, 25th Division, and the 2nd Battalion, 327th Regiment, 101st Airborne was placed under the operational control of TSNSA and the following defensive positions were established against the threat of another enemy attack. The positions were established in addition to the re-established and reinforced defensive perimeter posture of the primary defense forces:

- a. The 2/327/101st Airborne (less 1 company) - blocking position behind the 051 Gate area of penetration.
- b. The 1/18/1st Division (less 1 company) - placed in reserve in the southwest section of the base near the 25L runway.
- c. The 2/27/25th Division (less 1 company) - mobilized by the 377th Combat Support Group as a rapid reaction force stationed at the U.S. Army Heliport (southwest section of the base).
- d. The 3/4 Cav, 25th Division with one company of the 2/27/25th

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Division attached - positioned to the immediate south of the 056Gate (058 Bunker) as a rapid reaction force against the enemy threat from the Northwest.

e. One company of the 2/327/101st and one company of the 1/18/1st Division was placed in perimeter defense around MACV Headquarters. Disposition of the above elements was completed by 2100 hours. The base was considered secured at that time. At 2215 hours, Lt Col Coung resumed command of all Vietnamese forces and Colonel Thebeau with elements of headquarters, 1st Inf Division assumed command of all U.S. Army Forces by order of Major General Ware, Commander II Field Force Forward.

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GLOSSARY



JDOC - Joint Defense Operation Center  
ARVN - Army Republic Of Vietnam  
TSNSA - Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area  
TSN - Tan Son Nhut  
O.F. - Perimeter Post Identifier  
VNAF - Vietnamese Air Force  
R.F. - Regional Forces  
P.F. - Popular Forces  
AFAT - Air Force Advisory Team  
Task Force 35 - US Army Augmentation Forces From MACV Annex to 377th  
Security Police Squadron  
Task Force Peter - US Army Augmentation Forces from MACV Annex In  
Support of MACV Compound  
TACC - Tactical Air Control Center  
A.K.A. - Also Known As  
QRT - Quick Reaction Team  
SAT - Security Alert Team  
RSAT - Reserve Security Alert Team  
L.F.T. - Light Fire Team  
J.G.S. - Joint General Staff (South Vietnamese High Command)  
C.P. - Command Post  
CSC - Central Security Control  
M.G. - Machine Gun  
R.P.G. - Rocket Propelled Grenade  
H.E. - High Explosive

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