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INFORMATION

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*Pres file*  
Tuesday, February 13, 1968 -- 4:20 p.m.

Mr. President:

I believe you will wish to read this summary of information on the ARVN. In short:

- They were about 40-50% strength on 29 January because of Tet leaves;
- They may now be back to about 75% of strength;
- There are still some soldiers who have not been able to get back to their units, particularly in IV Corps;
- Komar is working on getting pacification going again;
- Westy has issued an excellent order in the same direction.

The full text that follows will give you a more precise feel for a somewhat uncertain and incomplete picture.

W. W. Rostow

cc: Mr. Clark Clifford  
General Maxwell D. Taylor

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By JL/rg, NARA, Date 2-14-92

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REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM ARMED FORCES RVNAF

1. Pre-TET Situation

Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) combat forces prior to TET consisted of 120 Infantry, 20 Ranger, nine Airborne, and six Marine Battalions. The operating field strength of the infantry battalion, that is the number of troops that could be put in the field to fight, averaged about 400. Since the average operating strength desired was 450, the pre-TET strength of ARVN forces was somewhat less than desired. A battalion with an operating field strength of 450 would have an overall authorized strength of about 650-700.

2. Strengths During TET

a. RVNAF commanders had authority to grant leaves up to 50 per cent of the assigned strengths of their units. Accordingly, the operating field strengths of many battalions at the onset of TET dropped to an average of 200. In a few instances, a unit commander knew an attack was coming in that area and did not grant leave for TET. Battalion strengths in these cases remained at 400 or at 500 if a ranger or airborne battalion.

b. At least in some divisions, ARVN troops began to return to their units on 3 February. For example, in the 7th Division, it was reported that 250 troops returned on 3 February and 100 more on the 4th. In one case, Go Cong, they were formed into a provisional reaction company. How general this return of troops to their units has been is not known.

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3. Reductions in RVNAF Strengths

a. Casualties During the TET Offensive

Reported casualties for ARVN units for the period 291800 January to 101200 February consisted of 1,900 killed, 7,135 wounded, and 86 missing in action.

The total of approximately 9,100 casualties represented about three per cent of the total ARVN force.

b. Desertions

There have been few reports received of desertions or defections. Elements of the ARVN 45th Regiment in Ban Me Thuot may have joined the Viet Cong; troops in ARVN uniforms and in vehicles of that unit fired on a US civilian compound, and the Communists claim the defection of parts of that unit. No information is available to confirm Communist claims of defections of elements of the 1st Division in Hue, or of troops in Ba Kuyen Province; however, due to the confused situation in Hue, their claims cannot be either confirmed or denied and remain "possibly true." Various Government of Vietnam (GVN) officials have mentioned defections by individual officers assigned to headquarters and support units in the Saigon area, but details on identifications and circumstances are lacking. In Sa Dec Province, however, the VC reportedly occupied a number of outposts (presumably Regional Force (RF) and Popular Force (PF)) in rural areas, and Liberation Front flags were reported flying

over them. Also in that province, RD cadres reportedly "melted away." In Chau Doc, some officials reportedly doffed their uniforms when the VC entered the city, but put them back on after the enemy was driven off. There is almost no information available on the status of RVNAF elements at the district village, and hamlet level, where the VC have been active in several provinces, nor on the status of RVNAF (RF and PF) elements on leave in rural areas during TET. These elements would seem to be vulnerable to local VC propaganda claims of success.

#### 4. Performance During the TET Offensive.

a. Although the data are incomplete, reflecting the fragmentary reporting, the effectiveness of RVNAF in combating enemy attacks during this period varied markedly. In general, the data reflect a mixed situation, with GVN forces reacting aggressively and courageously in some areas, but ineffectively and with malfeasance in others. No clear-cut geographic patterns are evident, except that most reports of ineffective performance come from IV Corps. Generally, however, the reaction of GVN forces seems to have varied in direct relation to the professional competence and performance of their leaders.

b. Leadership at the national and Corps levels apparently was effective. General Vien himself was reportedly being steady and dedicated, and the Commanders of the Rangers and National Police effectively led their forces in the Saigon fighting. The III Corps Commander, General Khang, reportedly performed well, but the I Corps

Commander, General Lam, has been implicitly criticized for an overly defensive posture in I Corps. The 22d and 23d Division Commanders in II Corps reportedly had their troops on alert during TET, and had restricted TET leaves; there are indications, however, that this alert was not fully honored in at least one province (Khanh Hoa).

c. At lower levels, the Commander of the 24th Special Sector (Kontum) reportedly performed very poorly, drawing criticism for his preoccupation with his personal safety and for the destruction caused by his heavy reliance on armor. The Province Chief in Ba Xuyen reportedly became hysterical and lost control, and the Chief of Quang Tri Province was ineffective. The Kien Hoa Province Chief, however, reportedly performed creditably even after receiving news that his family had been murdered by the Viet Cong in Saigon. In Binh Thuan, the Province Chief and his Police Chief squabbled and blamed each other for deficiencies in security before the attack. The Kontum Province Chief reacted quickly and effectively, demonstrating excellent leadership. The Thua Thien Province Chief was forced to hide for several days when <sup>the</sup> Viet Cong occupied his house. The Quang Nam Chief was quite effective in organizing and directing his forces and in attempting to maintain civil morale. No specific reports have been received on other officials at that level.

d. The alert posture of RVNAF elements varied, but seems to have been generally adequate, considering their normal standards observed during the TET holidays. Major deficiencies were noted in Chau Doc

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Province, where defenses apparently were totally relaxed for TET.

Quang Ngai forces, on the other hand, reportedly were not granted TET leave.

e. Some ARVN infantry units were effective in managing to resist repeated assaults of the enemy. However, it was reported that other units, after initial pindown by sniper fire, maneuvered only slightly or not at all, but called in armor or armed helicopter strikes often resulting in heavy volumes of fire being directed into civilian dwellings causing resentment against RVNAF troops. The initial reaction of RVNAF and other security elements to the Viet Cong attacks were generally described as fair to good with the notable exception of the forces in Vinh Long, Chau Doc, and Sa Dec Provinces. There was no organized resistance to the attack in Chau Doc, and Rangers in Vinh Long were slow in reacting and unaggressive afterwards. In Sa Dec, provincial authorities initially "refused to operate." Considerable confusion was reported in the early defense of Vinh Long. ARVN units in Ba Xuyen were reported ineffective. In Phong Dinh, the reaction was slow but once the troops rallied, they displayed exceptional bravery and esprit. Outstanding defensive performances were recorded by ARVN units in An Xuyen, Khanh Hoa, Dinh Tuong, and Kien Hoa. A lack of planning and organization was reported, however, in Kien Hoa.

f. ARVN's performance, after the initial enemy attacks were repelled and the cities were secured, seems generally to have lacked aggressiveness. In only a few Provinces (Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and

Dinh Tuong) were there indications of reasonably aggressive pursuit and a determination to maintain pressure on the enemy. In Quang Tri, ARVN units reacted slowly to attacks on district towns near the province capital, and their tactics tended to maximize property damage. "Over-reaction" or excessive destruction was reported in other areas, including Kontum, Vinh Long, and Chau Doc. In IV Corps, ARVN forces were generally described as passive, unaggressive, and preoccupied with defensive -- rather than offensive -- operations, except in those areas where US troops were brought in to assist in clearing the provincial capitals. In one instance, the presence of US forces was described as "electrifying" in its impact on ARVN. The ARVN 7th Division (colocated with a brigade of the US 9th Division in My Tho), however, has had its troops out on operations during the past few days.

##### 5. Current Situation

a. There are few reports indicative of current RVNAF combat effectiveness. In Quang Tri, concern has been expressed about dwindling ammunition, gasoline, and other supplies and the absence of resupply movements from the beleaguered 1st Division headquarters in Hue. Reports on casualties in individual units have been rare. In two instances ARVN units are reported at considerably reduced strength; one battalion reinforcing Vinh Long reportedly had only 90 men, while another battalion in Chau Doc reportedly had only 200 men present for duty of an assigned strength of 600. Many units are considerably below strength because of the apparently widespread disruption of communications and

transportation facilities which probably has delayed the return of troops from TET leave. Moreover, the psychological impact of the Viet Cong offensive may add to the normally high AWOL and desertion rates associated with TET.

b. There are virtually no reports specifically describing RVNAF morale as other than fair to good. Other indicators -- lack of aggressiveness, indiscipline in the form of looting and pilfering -- may suggest that morale has been shaken to some extent. Moreover, some officers have expressed concern at the lack of US military support in certain areas, and others have repeated rumors prevalent among the civil populace alleging US collusion in various forms with the Viet Cong. Vietnamese Marines fighting in Saigon have expressed dissatisfaction with the US M-16 rifle, alleging it is inferior to the AK-47 automatic rifles with which the Viet Cong are equipped. This concern has not been reported elsewhere, but other RVNAF elements, not so well-equipped as the Marines, may be once again apprehensive over their relatively limited firepower as they were when they first encountered enemy units armed with the new family of 7.62-mm small arms in 1964-65. The Vietnamese Marines have also reflected concern with the apparently plentiful supply of B-40 and B-41 rocket launchers in the hands of Viet Cong units in Saigon; they have also been used extensively in other areas and may have adversely impressed other RVNAF elements.

c. Popular reactions to ARVN performance have been mixed. In two instances (Quang Tri and Khanh Hoa), the populace reportedly

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indicated gratitude or appreciation for ARVN's performance. In most areas, the people are reported to be confused, frightened, traditionally passive or non-committal, while in other areas (Quang Tri, Phan Thiet, Long Khanh, Vinh Binh, Vinh Long, Ba Xuyen, and Chau Doc) the popular reaction has been generally unfavorable to RVNAF. A mixture of these reactions has been reported in the Saigon-Gia Dinh area. Criticism of the RVNAF ranges from complaints about the lack of security to bitterness at the allegedly wanton destruction of property. In several areas (Vinh Long, Ba Xuyen, and Saigon) looting and pilfering by ARVN and police elements has been charged.

d. There are no uncommitted RVNAF forces in RVN at this time. At present, four RVNAF battalions are technically listed as uncommitted. In point of fact, in each Corps tactical zone one battalion is held as a reaction force.

The RVNAF response to the current emergency situation is summarized in the battalion mission assignments as of 29 January and 10 February.

	<u>29 January</u>	<u>10 February</u>
Combat Operations	62	90
Security	24	29
Training	3	0
Reserve	15	4
Pacification	51	32
<hr/> TOTAL	<hr/> 155	<hr/> 155

e. An assessment of ARVN battalion effectiveness at this time is complicated by several factors: the reduction in strength of approximately 9,100 troops killed, wounded or missing; the aftermath of the TET holiday leave situation (3,000 have been given transportation back to their units, many others await transportation); an untabulated number of unauthorized absences stemming from TET leave; and continuing recruiting problems. Using a criteria of a minimum of 60 per cent personnel present for duty constituting an effective unit, RVNAF battalion effectiveness is indicated as:

ARVN Infantry (120 Battalions)	* Effective
Ranger (20 Battalions)	* Effective
Airborne (9 Battalions)	4 Effective
VN MC (6 Battalions)	6 Effective

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\* Battalion strength breakdowns for ARVN Infantry and Ranger Battalions are not available at this time, but based on authorized strengths, the over-all per cent for duty level on 7 February was: ARVN Infantry 50 per cent, Ranger 43 per cent. As of 7 February, the average present-for-duty strength of RVNAF Battalions was:

	<u>Authorized</u>	<u>Present</u>
ARVN Infantry	639	320
Ranger	755	320
Airborne	836	350
VNMC	876	500

As an example of unit strength deficiencies, the 9th Airborne Battalion

present for duty totals range from a low of 157 to a high of 500 out of the authorized strength of 836.

f. In sum, in view of the incomplete information available it is difficult to generalize with confidence. It does appear that most ARVN units reacted reasonably well to the initial attacks. Subsequently there seemed generally to have been a lack of aggressiveness, and some breakdowns in discipline were reported. Although morale and confidence seem to have been shaken, morale does not appear to have collapsed. Because of the disruption of communications, RVNAF units are probably not well informed of the situation and thus susceptible to the same rumors that seem to be upsetting the civil populace. Thus their vulnerability to Viet Cong propaganda has probably increased. All factors considered, some ARVN elements would seem to be ill-prepared for sustained or renewed pressure without a respite for several weeks or even months, and some in isolated areas operating without close US support might disintegrate. However, many of the units can be expected to still give a good account of themselves.