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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

NLJ 96-197

By ip, NARA Date 12-4-96

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ACTION EA 15

INFO CIAE 00,DODE 00,NSAE 00,NSCE 00,SSO 00,USIE 00,GPM 03,NSC 10,
SC 01,SP 02,SS 20,RSC 01,L 03,H 02,SAH 03,SAL 01,IO 13,P 04,
INR 07,NIC 01,AID 28,SR 01,ORM 03,/118 W

P 111705Z FEB 68
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6422

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 19005

SUB: SITUATION IN PHUOC TUY PROVINCE

1. PROCLAIMING THAT " THE TIME WHICH COMES ONCE IN A THOUSAND YEARS HAS COME," REINFORCED VIET CONG PROVINCIAL UNITS ATTACKED KEY TARGETS IN PHUON TUY PROVINCE ON 1 FEBRUARY. ALTHOUGH REPELLED AT THE VAN KIEP MILITARY TRAINING CENTER THREE MILES EAST OF THE PROVINCE TOWN, BA RIA, THE ENEMY WAS ABLE TO HOLD MUCH OF BA RIA FOR TWO DAYS. DURING THIS TIME, TOWNSPEOPLE SAY, THE VIET CONG CLAIMED THAT THEY ALSO HELD VAN KIEP AND LONG DIEN DISTRICT TOWN, FIVE KILOMETERS EAST, CAUSING CONSIDERABLE ANXIETY WHICH ENDURED UNTIL ARVN REINFORCEMENTS RELIEVED THE TOWN ON THE MORNING OF 3 FEBRUARY. NOW, IT IS REPORTED THAT THE PEOPLE SAY THAT THE VIET CONG HAVE BEEN BADLY BEATEN.

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2. IN A PROPAGANDA LEAFLET, THE ENEMY CALLED ON THE POPULATION AND RVANF TO RISE UP AGAINST THE "AMERICAN AGGRESSORS AND THE NATION-SELLING VIET-TRAITORS." THE BA RIE POPULATION, LARGELY THE FAMILITES OF CIVIL SERVANTS AND SOLDIERS, REMAINED PASSIVE.

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NO GVN SOLDIERS ARE KNOWN TO HAVE DESERTED. HOWEVER, IN LONG DIEN, WHICH WAS ATTACKED ON 7 AND 8 FEBRUARY, THE VIET CONG ARE SAID BY CIVIL SERVANTS THERE TO HAVE HAD PLENTY OF POPULAR SUPPORT. TOWNSPEOPLE ALLEGEDLY SHOWED ENEMY TROOPS WHERE GVN CIVIL SERVANTS, CADRE AND SOLDIERS LIVED, AND HID THE VIET CONG WHEN AUSTRALIAN TROOPS ENTERED LONG DIEN. THE SAME SOURCES SUGGEST THAT MISRULE BY A SUCCESSION OF CORRUPT DISTRICT CHIEFS HAD DONE MUCH TO FOSTER ANTI-GOVERNMENT SENTIMENT IN THE TOWN.

3. INFORMED AMERICANS IN PHUOC TUY BELIEVE THAT THE VIET CONG ATTACK ON BA RIA AND THE VAN KIEP CAMP WAS INTENDED ONLY TO BE A HIT AND RUN SHOW OF FORCE. THE ENEMY EXPECTED, THEY SUGGEST, TO ATTACK BEFORE DAWN, REMAIN THROUGHOUT THE DAY, AND PULL OUT IN THE EVENING. HOWEVER, THE ATTACK ON VAN KIEP WAS DELAYED WHEN THE ENEMY GUIDES WENT ASTRAY, AND DID NOT BEGIN BEFORE RANGER UNITS DEFENDING THE CAMP WERE ON FULL ALERT. THE ATTACK WAS A FIASCO;

~~PAGE 3 RUMOR LOSS OF CAMP~~
ABOUT 50 OF AN ATTACKING FORCE ESTIMATED AT 200 WERE KILLED.

4. BA RIA WAS NOT SO FORTUNATE. THERE ENEMY TROOPS DUG IN ON THE EAST END OF TOWN WHILE HARASSING THE PROVINCE AND SECTOR HEADQUARTERS

CORDS COMPOUND AND OTHER ISLANDS OF RESISTANCE TO THE NORTH OF THE MARKET. MEANWHILE, THE BULK OF THE FRIENDLY TROOPS, TOGETHER WITH THE PROVINCE CHIEF, MARINE MAJOR NGUYEN BA TRUOC, WITHDREW TO VAN KIEP. AT THE CAMP, IT SEEMS FROM FRAGMENTARY INFORMATION AND RUMOR, THE PROVINCE CHIEF LOCKED HORNS WITH THE CAMP COMMANDER, LTC LE TRINH QUY. TRUCE, IT IS HINTED, FELT THAT HE HAD LOST FACE WHEN FORCED TO ABANDON BA RIA AND WISHED TO USE TROOPS IN TRAINING AT THE CAMP TO RELIEVE THE TOWN; QUY STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO RELEASE THEM. THE IMASSE WAS FINALLY BROKEN WHEN ARVN REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVED FROM XUAN LOC (18TH DIVISION HQ). THE ENEMY HAD BEEN UNDER CONTINUOUS PRESSURE FROM AMERICAN GUNSHIPS, BUT IT RESISTED FIERCELY IN HOUSE TO HOUSE FIGHTING. THE WELL-TRAINED AND WELL-EQUIPPED ENEMY TROOPS WERE FINALLY CLEARED OUT BY THE MORNING OF 3 FEBRUARY, LEAVING BEHIND PERHAPS A HUNDRED DESTROYED OR BADLY DAMAGED HOUSES.

5. PRISONERS HAVE INCLUDED A NUMBER OF RECENT NVA REINFORCEMENTS.

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THE ENEMY FORCE WAS ESTIMATED AT SIX HUNDRED MEN. ENGAGEMENTS DURING THE PAST WEEK HAVE, ACCORDING TO REPORTS, WIPED OUT HALF OF THIS FORCE.

BUT PROVINCIAL ADMISORS BELIEVE THE TOTAL OF ENEMY DEAD IS MORE
LIKELY ABOUT TWO HUNDRED. THERE WERE 15 TO 20 CIVILIANS KILLED IN
THE BA RIA FIGHTING, AND AS MANY MORE WOUNDED. ABOUT FIVE
HUNDRED FAMILIES, FLEEING FROM THE FIGHTING OR THE THREAT OF IT,
HAVE BECOME TEMPORARY REFUGEES. THE FIGURE INCLUDES THE
FAMILIES OF MOST OF THE CIVIL SERVANTS, WHO HAVE IN THE MAIN
STUCK TO THIER POSTS WHILE EVACUATINGG THEIR DEPENDENTS TO THE
SAFETY OF NEARBY VUNG TAU.

6. THE CRISIS HAS REVEALED BOTH HEROES AND GOATS. AT SUOI NGHE, A REFUGEE HAMLET, AN RF PLATOON LOOKED ON PASSIVELY FROM ITS POST WHILE TEN VIET CONG HELD A KANGAROO COURT AND EXECUTED THE HAMLET CHIEF AND HIS DEPUTIES. AN ARMED PROPAGANDA TEAM HELD OFF ENEMY PROBES AGAINST THE CHIEU HOI CENTER THROUGHOUT 1 AND 2 FEBRUARY AND ON THE NIGHT OF 2 ND EVACUATED ALL OF THE HOI CHANH TO THE CHIEU HOI VILLAGE TWO KILOMETERS EAST OF BA RIA. THE 52ND RANGER BATTALION FOUGHT WELL, AND THEN IS REPORTED TO HAVE SYSTEMATICALLY LOOTED THE PROVINCE TOWN OF ELECTRICAL

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AND HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES. VIETNAMESE NURSES LIED THEMSELVES BLUE IN THE FACE WHILE A KOREAN MEDICAL TEAM HID IN A BACK ROOM OF THE HOSPITAL. AFTER HIDING FOR THIRTY HOURS, TWO OF THE KOREANS DASHED OUT AMONG SIXTY VIET CONG WHO HAD OCCUPIED THE HOSPITAL TO SECURE ASSISTANCE FROM A PASSING AUSTRALIAN COLUMN. PROVINCE CHIEF TRUOC, SAYING THAT HE NOW KNOWS WHOM HE CAN COUNT ON AMONG HIS STAFF, HAS THREATENED TO HAVE DO-NOTHING OFFICERS TRANSFERRED TO THE FRONT LINES IN I CORPS.

7. MORALE IS STILL QUITE SHAKY, AND IS PERHAPS BEST ILLUSTRATED BY THE CURRENT RUMOR THAT, SINCE THE VIET CONG HAD BEEN DEFEATED ELSEWHERE, THEY WOULD CONCENTRATE THEIR EFFORTS ON PHUOC TUY.

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AND LONG KHANH, WHERE THEY HAD DONE RELATIVELY BETTER. NONETHELESS, RECOVERY SEEMS TO BE UNDERWAY. MAJOR TRUOC TOLD HIS SERVICE CHIEFS AT THEIR FIRST MEETING AFTER THE ATTACK ON BA RIA THAT ALL OF THEIR REPUTATIONS, AND ESPECIALLY HIS, WERE SUFFERING. THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO SUFFER, HE ADDED, EVERY DAY THAT PASSED BEFORE ORDER AND PUBLIC SERVICES WERE RESTORED.

8. ADVISORS FEEL THAT THE PUBLIC WORKS, HEALTH AND INFORMATION

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SERVICES ARE PERFORMING VERY WELL. THEY ARE VEHEMENT IN THEIR CONDEMNATION OF A LACKLUSTER REFUGEE/SOCIAL WELFARE CHIEF WHO SEEMS TO HAVE DONE LITTLE BUT PAD THE LISTS OF REFUGEES WITH PHONIES. ON 9 FEBRUARY THE MARKET IN BA RIA WAS OPERATING AS USUAL FOR THE FIRST TIME. PRICES HAD STARTED TO FALL BUT WERE STILL TWO AND THREE TIMES NORMAL. BUS TRANSPORT TO SAIGON, NORMALLY EIGHTY PIASTRES, COSTS SEVEN HUNDRED.

9. DEPUTY PROVINCE CHIEF FOR ADMINISTRATION PHAM VAN KHA, WHO REMAINED WITH HIS FAMILY IN THE PROVINCE HEADQUARTERS COMPOUND THROUGHOUT THE BATTLE, EXPECTS THE PHUOC TY ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY TO BE BACK TO NORMAL, EXCEPT IN LONG DIEN, WITHIN A WEEK. HE FEELS THE FIGHT RESULTED IN CLEAR-CUT PSYCHOLOGICAL GAINS FOR THE GVN. NOTING THAT MOST OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE WERE PRO-GVN, HE ADDED THAT THE ATTACK MUST HAVE DISABUSED ANY WHO HAD PRO-COMMUNIST SYMPATHIES. THE VIET CONG DID NOTHING POSITIVE, KHA STRESSED, BUT ONLY BROUGHT HARDSHIP ON THE TOWNSPEOPLE, REVEALING TO MOST OF THEM FOR THE FIRST TIME THE TRUE FACE OF THE ENEMY. ATTACKING DURING TET ONLY ADDED INSULT TO INJURY.

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SC 01,SP 02,SS 20,RSC 01,L 03,H 02,SAH 03,IO 13,P 04,INR 07,
NIC 01,AID 28,SR 01,ORM 03,RSR 01,SAL 01,/119 W

P 111740Z FEB 68
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6423

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 19005

10. VIETNAMESE SURVEY PERSONNEL REPORT THAT THE PEOPLE ACCEPT
DESTRUCTION OF THEIR HOUSES AS NECESSARY BECAUSE VIET CONG
WERE FIGHTING FOR THEM. NEVERTHELESS, THEY HOPE FOR COMPENSATION--
A SUBJECT ON WHICH THE GVN HAS YET TO REVEAL ITS INTENTIONS.
THOSE UNABLE TO GET ON THE LIST FOR FREE COMMODITIES
DISTRIBUTION ARE FEELING THE PINCH OF HIGH PRICES. THE
AUSTRALIAN TROOPS (TWO COMPANIES REMAINED IN PHUOC TUY; THE
REST WERE MOVED TO SUPPORT SWEEPS IN THE BIEN HOA AREA).
RECEIVE THE HIGHEST PRAISE. THE PEOPLE OF BA RIA ARE SAID TO
HOPE THAT THE AUSSIES WILL RETURN TO PHUOC TUY AND REESTABLISH
SECURITY. AT WHICH POINT THE REFUGEES IN VUNG TAU WILL ALL RETURN.
RANGER LOOTING IS, OF COURSE, VIEWED VERY DIMLY, BUT THIS
DID NOT STOP SOME CIVILIANS FROM SIMILARLY STRIPPING A

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PARTIALLY DESTROYED AMERICAN PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATIVE'S
HOUSE, APPARENTLY ACCORDING TO THE
MAXIM "ANYTHING AMERICAN IS FAIR GAME." THE TORTUOUS
RUMORS REPORTED ELSEWHERE AS WELL REGARDING SOME SORT OF UNDER-
HANDED COLLUSION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE VIET CONG
ARE ALSO CURRENT IN PHUOC TUY. BUNKER