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Case # NLI/CBS 172a-7

Monday, August 1, 1966

Document # 9

TEXT OF CABLE FROM GENERAL WESTMORELAND (MAC, 6548)

On Thursday, the 28th, I visited Operation HASTINGS/Lam Son 289. This combined operation has been highly successful, served the purpose of spoiling the planned attack by the 324B Division, and has now virtually petered out. Some of my observations on the situation may be of interest.

During April we received our first indication that another division was moving from North Vietnam to the South. At that time, my feeling was that it would probably move through the Laos Panhandle to reinforce North Vietnamese troops already positioned in or near the Central Highlands of the Second Corps area. This deployment was consistent with my estimate of Hanoi's strategy.

In mid-May, night air reconnaissance first noted considerable truck traffic moving south towards the DMZ on highways 1A and 101. On the 1st of June we received indications that elements of the Division were moving across the DMZ. I believe that the enemy's initial plans for deployment of this Division were changed because of the successful Tiger Hound operation and in consideration of the political turmoil in the First Corps.

On the 10th of June it became clear that major elements of the 324B Division had moved into Quang Tri province. By the 13th our intelligence had crystallized to the point where a decision could be made to execute contingency plans that had been developed several months ago for offensive operations in the northern First Corps.

On the 15th, Operation HASTINGS/Lam Son 289 was launched following B-52 strikes which were initiated on the 13th. Participating in the operation were major elements of the Marine 3d Division, five battalions of the Vietnamese General Reserve, and battalions of two regiments of the 1st Vietnamese Division.

There are indications that some of the initial B-52 strikes hit one or more control headquarters of the enemy. Despite this, the enemy initially fought tenaciously. I had suspected that he would attempt new tactical innovations based on his experience in fighting the U.S. troops, and one such tactic became evident at the outset. The enemy had secured most of the likely landing zones in the area with the result that several helicopter landings had to be aborted because of enemy fire and 14 of 18 patrols that were inserted had to be extracted because of enemy pressure. It was, therefore, necessary to place extensive artillery and air strikes on landing zones before they could be safely used.

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-2-

The enemy had prepared in the rugged hills of north central Quang Tri province a base of division size. His line of communications consisted of two main routes across the DMZ. Stockpiles of supplies had been pre-positioned in and north of the DMZ in the heavy jungle but in areas that could be supported by truck transportation.

The Seventh Air Force has been, for a number of weeks, concentrating strikes in the extended battle area north of the DMZ. However, this interdiction program was intensified by initiation of Operation TALLY HO. This air campaign, which will continue indefinitely, has had significant results in destroying transportation and supplies that had been stockpiled to support the planned offensive. Large supply areas are being targeted for B-52 strikes since they are dispersed and well hidden in the jungle, thereby requiring saturation bombing.

Meanwhile, nine reconnaissance teams have been introduced into Laos along the Quang Tri border. Thus far these teams have discovered what was expected, namely, a major infiltration route from Laos through a valley that crosses the border approximately 10 kilometers south of the DMZ, and a logistic complex approximately 7 kilometers south of Highway 9. Tactical air has been brought in and several large secondary explosions have occurred following strikes on buildings. B-52 strikes will be required to neutralize these supply areas.

I feel that the enemy had planned to over-run friendly positions and district towns in the hills of Quang Tri, isolate Dong Ha and Quang Tri and exploit his success by an offensive from Laos against friendly positions and installations along Highway 9 in western Quang Tri. The enemy has been successful in interdicting Highway 1 and railroad between Danang and Dong Ha by destroying a number of bridges and mining the railroad at several points.

The 324B Division has been dispersed and apparently demoralized. It is no longer an effective fighting force and will require some time to reconstitute itself. Although there are enemy elements remaining in Quang Tri province, there is evidence that a number of troops have moved back across the DMZ. It is significant that on at least three occasions, North Vietnamese troops broke and ran while being engaged by U.S. Marines.

This operation was well planned and executed by the Third Marine and its subordinate elements, effectively supported by Navy support activity, Danang. The coordination and cooperation between Brig. General English, Walt's Task Force Commander, and Colonel Troung, Commander, First Vietnamese Division,* has been noteworthy. Their command posts have been co-located. The fire support provided by artillery, air elements and B-52's has been extremely effective

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* This is the Division that
wounded us so, a few
months back.

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-3-

We are now preparing a detailed defense plan to prevent further intrusion by the enemy in large numbers across the DMZ. My staff has been studying this project in coordination with the Third Marine, and forces will be appropriately positioned for this mission before the beginning of the north east monsoon season. I will report further my approach to this problem.

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