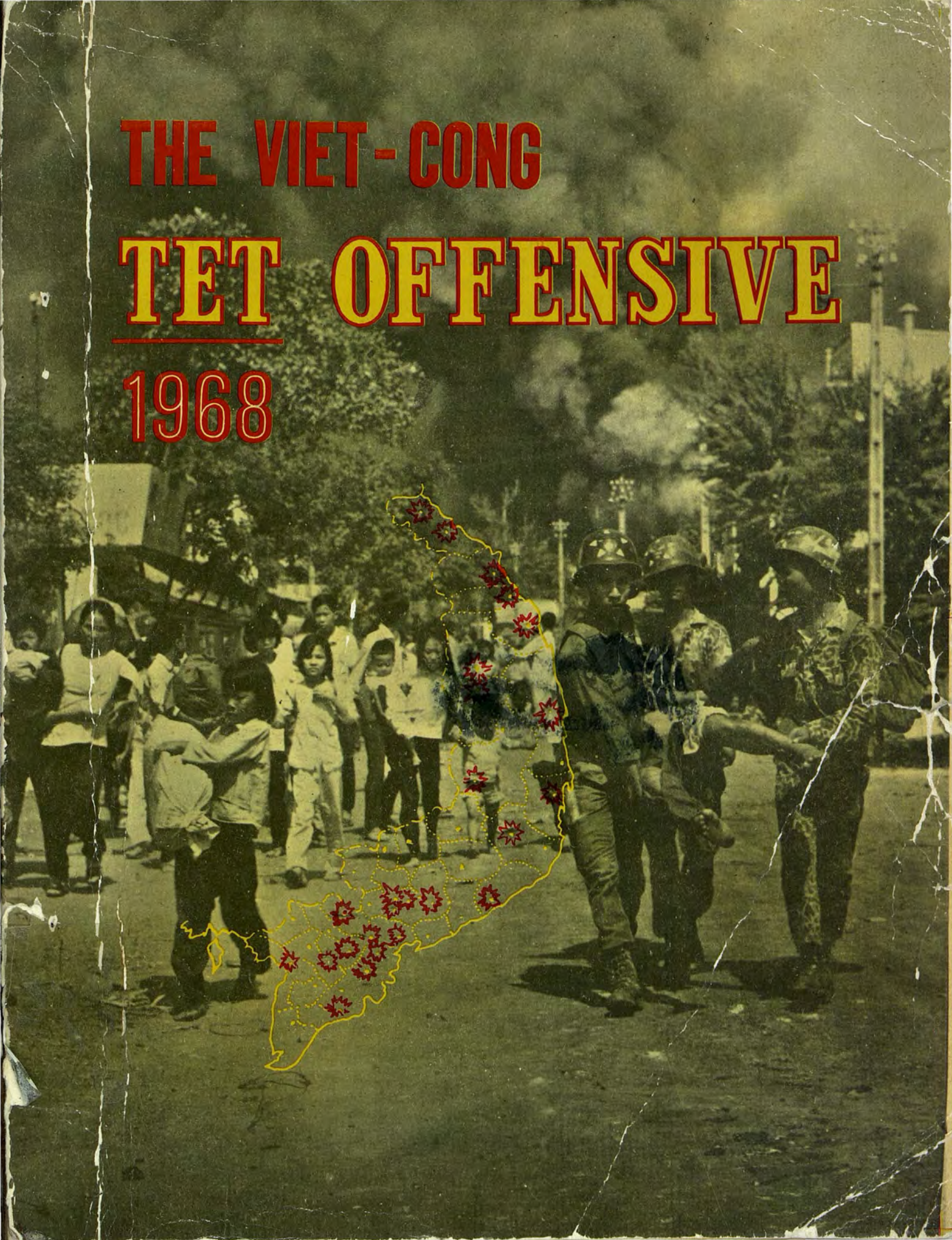
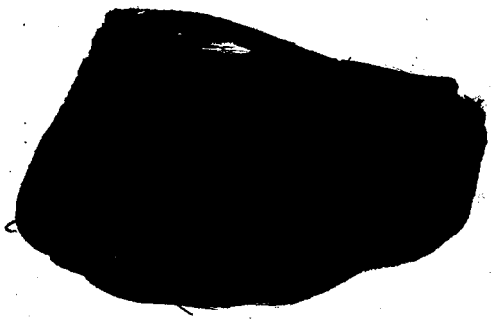
THE VIET-CONG
TET OFFENSIVE
1968



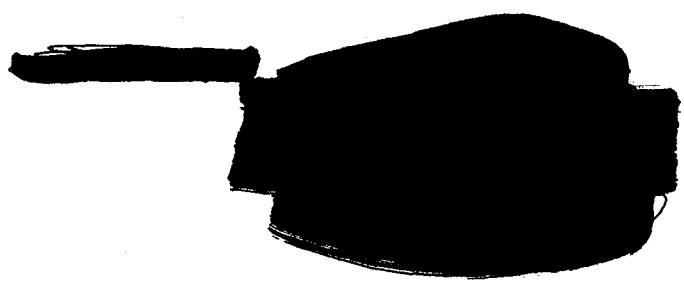


Series of Combat History

THE VIET CONG
« TET » OFFENSIVE
(1968)

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In memory of the many Freedom Fighters who have given their lives so that the South Vietnamese nation might live, and in memory of the many innocent people who found death at the hands of their V.C. "liberators".

Joint General Staff, RVNAF

INTRODUCTION

COMMUNISTS everywhere share a common characteristic. They are experts in the use of a terminology based on two words :"revolution" and "people". In doing so, they evidently seek to create the impression that only they are revolutionary and only they have the interests of the masses at heart.

In the Bolshevik revolution in Russia over half a century ago as well as in the protracted Vietnam conflict, the Communists have also maintained that their revolution was aimed at the overthrow of a totalitarian regime full of injustices. And they have always boasted to be the only ones to seek the establishment of a new society based on freedom, peace and the free pursuit of happiness.

Let us temporarily set aside the question whether the Communists really have the interests of the masses at heart and let us see whether they are justified in their claim to be the only true servants of the people.

For many centuries, years and years before Communism was invented, there have been many who think that the best political base is the people. Confucius, Mencius, Jesus Christ and the Buddha, all these thinkers and many others have agreed in their writings and preachings that service to the people is the best basis for any political doctrine.

It ensues therefrom that the principle behind the Communists' "people's revolution" is nothing new, indeed. On the contrary, such Communist deeds as were recorded at Quynh-Luu, Budapest and Poznan, and more recently such developments as the Chinese aggression in Tibet and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, clearly prove that the Communists really do not care about the interests of the masses and may betray revolutionary principles in the most blatant manner.

More particularly in the northern part of our country, although the Communist regime has been boasting for the past twenty years the success of their revolution, the people's life is still a long

string of unhappy days. Instead of the notions of independence, liberty and happiness they were promised in the constitution,North Vietnam has grown more and more dependent on Russia and China. The North Vietnamese people have been forced to work as slaves, and the 20,000,000 sons and daughters of the Dragon have gone from one predicament to another.

Not content with only imposing their will on those of the North, the Hanoi authorities have tried to impose their inhuman regime on the remaining free Vietnamese living below the seventeenth parallel. And, loyal to their notion of people's war, they have consistently sought the implementation of the set of strategy and tactics that have proven effective in other such conflicts.

From the sabotage of bridges and roads to make their presence felt to the reduction of the people to a state of total passiveness through discriminate or indiscriminate terror, the Communists have not refrained from anything, including most savage deeds, to foster their objectives.

Within the framework of this "Introduction", we cannot, of course, give a detailed analysis of the strategy and tactics of the enemy and their inhuman character. It is simply our intention to ask you to read this book on their "General Offensive" (1968) fully so as to get an idea of their real intentions. We are sure you will agree with us whether the Communists really seek a revolution in the interests of the people or not.

In obvious contempt for the sacredness of the New Year holidays, evident disregard of their own promises to cease fire for seven days, and in complete scorn for the welfare of the citizen,the Communists suddenly launched an unprecedented large-scale offensive that sowed death and destruction on a scale that even the Vietnamese have not known after 20 years of war.

But these can be said to be nothing as compared to what they asked the people to do during these attacks. In Saigon, in Hue, and in many other provincial cities, the Communists resorted to the most incredible barbarous methods to force the people to "rise up". And they also proved incomparable in killing off the seeds of opposition : the people of Saigon were witness to the murder of hundreds of families and the people of Hue made to see the burial of thousands of persons still alive.

Their "people's revolution" tactics thus failed. Wherever the Communists came, the people simply left the place. But let us not give you any more details since you may charge us with propaganda making. We simply invite you to screen the many pictures that adorn the following pages of this historic document. For we are sure these pictures are more convincing than hundreds of editorials and these impartial reports are more factual than hundreds of the most well prepared indictments.

After you have finished reading this book, we simply would like to ask you to stop and think for a while and see whether the Communists are really revolutionary and genuinely have the interest of the people at heart.

APO, 4002, 1 July 1969

General CAO VAN VIEN
Chief, Joint General Staff
RVN Armed Forces
Saigon, Republic of Vietnam



PREFACE

Authors of strategic tenets, past and present, have displayed one noted similarity : advocacy of any strategem to accomplish the objectives. In actual warfare it is only natural that a party to a conflict should take full advantage of the opponent's weaknesses to better its own chance of success.

Sun-tse, the great Chinese strategist, has dwelt extensively on this point in a book entitled "Military Struggle". A Chinese military author of the name of Ly Te Xuyen, who lived many centuries after Sun, also was to propose something closely related to the Chinese master's teaching. In his book entitled "VIET DIEN U LINH TAP", Xuyen claimed that,"It is much better to attack the enemy than to wait for his attack".

Against this background of military advice, should we forgive North Vietnam and the Communist Liberation Front (NLF) for seeking our destruction in the holiday period that marked the beginning of the Year of the Monkey (1968)? This action was in obvious contempt of the safety and well-being of the common people.

No, we certainly should not.

The enemy should not get all the blame, however. Each and every one of us should claim some of it too. We committed the mistake of considering our foes as civilized human beings whose suggestion for a week-long holiday truce reflected to some extent a respect for traditions and the well-being of the citizen. In the pre-Tet days of last year we also made the tragic error of underestimating the machiavellism of our foes and failed to devise proper measures to prevent their plot.

For those who still nurtured doubts about the wickedness of the enemy or still might toy with the idea that the Communists "are patriots in their own way",the Tet offensive was the best opportunity to see the Viet Cong insurgents and their North Vietnamese accomplices in their true light. Not only did the Communists show absolute contempt for the people's welfare in starting an unprecedented offensive at the height of the nation's most sacred holiday but their conduct throughout the land eloquently disproved their claims

to be the true defenders of human brotherhood and lovers of the fatherland.

The Communist effort was to serve no real purpose. Although Hanoi's plan of action was remarkable and the strategy and tactics employed by Communist troops equally unique - these were to put them temporarily at an advantage in Saigon and many other big cities - the situation was reversed within a few hours and it soon was evident that the Winter-Spring Campaign was a catastrophe of major proportions for the attackers.

One of the reasons Hanoi failed to achieve their aims was the immensely effective reaction of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. The South Vietnamese soldier fought bravely and effectively in obvious contrast to the enemy criticisms that had often been leveled against him. On the contrary, Viet Cong soldiers did not show themselves in their best light and were denied support from the very people they had always claimed to be trying to liberate.

What the Viet Cong radio described as "glorious achievements" during the two waves of attack in the early months of 1968 amounted to total of 60,000 Communists killed, another 10,000 taken prisoner and over 17,000 of their weapons captured by government troops. Allied losses, although heavy, did not approach one tenth of those suffered by the insurgents.

These "achievements" took the form of untold sufferings for the common people : 14,000 civilians killed, including persons of all ages and social strata, 50,000 houses destroyed and the reduction of 700,000 persons to a state of dire poverty.

From a moral view point, however, these were petty things as compared to what the Communists did militarily during the campaign. With most of their experienced fighters no longer available for the attacks, they resorted to dispatching teenage boys to find certain death in battle. They also pounded population centers with absolutely no strategic or tactical value with hundreds of rockets for the primary purpose of punishing innocent people for their non-cooperation.

"The Communist Tet offensive 1968" has been written not so much to bare Viet Cong crimes, vis-a-vis humanity, rather it has been prepared with the hopes of awakening those, among the two billion people of the world, who still nurture illusions about Com-

munism and Communists. It also has been compiled at great speed in order to demonstrate to the world the incomparable determination of the Vietnamese people to remain free in the face of untold hardships and sufferings inflicted by the hands of their "liberators".

The reader is completely free to assess the material herein presented. In our humble view, it is eloquent enough and needs no furthur elaboration.

LTC PHAM VAN SON
Chief, Military History Division
J-5, Joint General Staff
RVN Armed Forces
Saigon, Republic of Vietnam

FOREWORD

The following pages have been written to record the many developments that constitute the Communist 'General Offensive' of 1968. They have been compiled with the simple intention to collect in book form the many lessons of history that are of concern to each and every one of the members of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

In compiling this book, which we should like to be as accurate as possible, we have dispatched a group of military historians to many areas of the Republic to collect information and interview many of the central characters of the dramas that unfolded there. We have to say, however, that the Viet Cong 'Tet' offensive was of such a magnitude as to make a complete gathering of facts an impossible undertaking.

Moreover, with time passing so very rapidly relegating quite a few details into oblivion and with the reconstruction work progressing most satisfactorily and healing the wounds of war, our task was not an easy one. We have, thus, to rely on some of the press reports that were published at the time of the 'Tet' fighting and make them parts of this book with the hope that their authors will not object to our doing so without seeking their permission. In view of the common good, we dare hope that they accept herein our most heartfelt gratitude.

Also, in our effort to publish this book, we have received invaluable help of many military commands that came in the form of pictures and documents directly related to the many developments of this nation's history in the first half of the year 1968. We should like to acknowledge hereby our sincerest thanks for their immense assistance without which this book could not have been written.

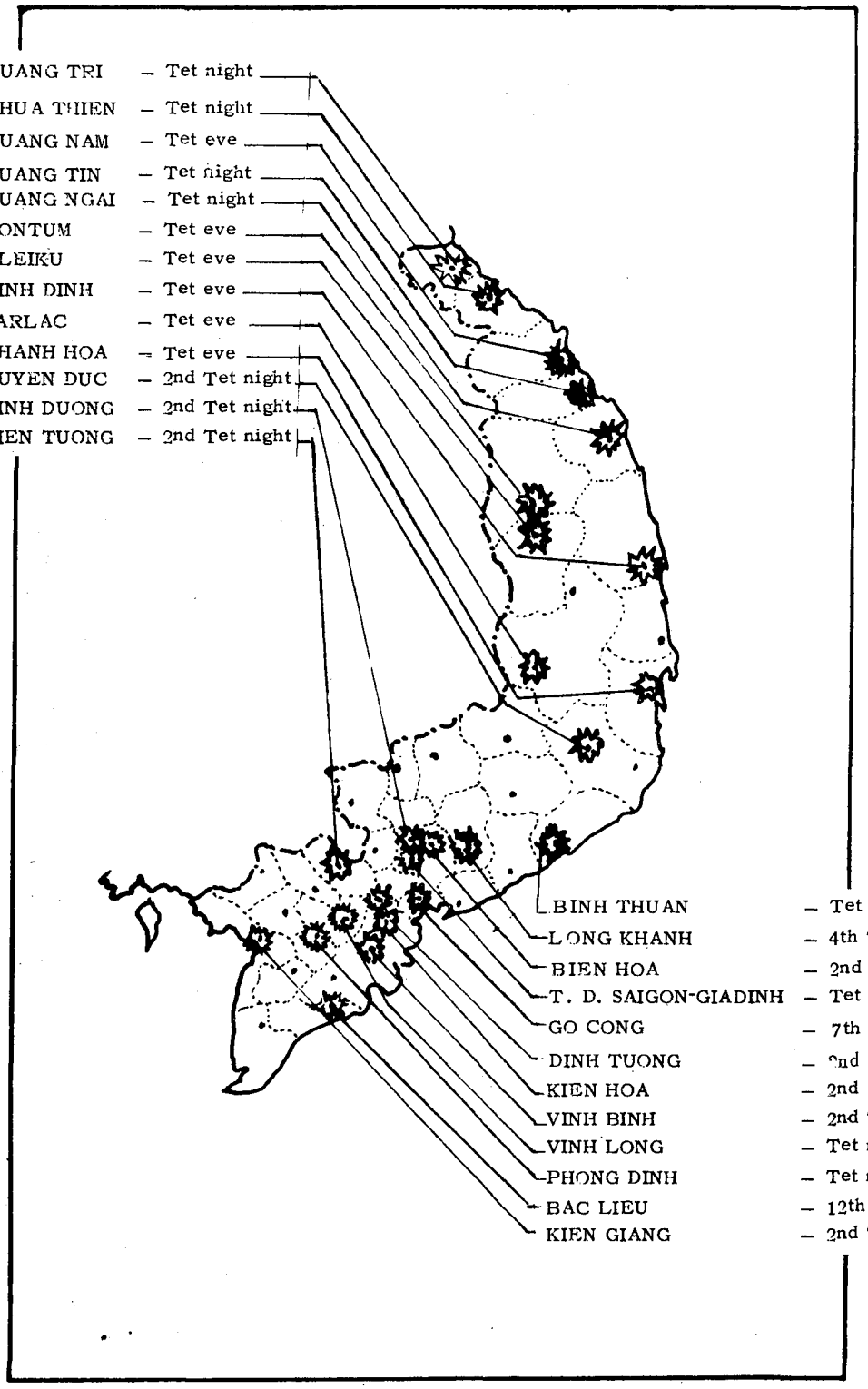
Moreover, let us say that this book per force will bear quite a few shortcomings which we would like to eliminate with the help of our readers. If you are in possession of documents and information, we would like to invite you to share these with us. For a better second edition of this book, you are kindly invited to write us at the following address : History Section, J5/JGS/RVNAF, APO.4002.

History Section
J5/Joint General Staff
RVN Armed Forces
Saigon, Republic of Vietnam

CHAPTER I

GENERAL NATURE OF THE V.C. WINTER - SPRING CAMPAIGN (1968)

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF SOUTH VIET NAM



CITIES ATTACKED BY VIET CONG DURING TET (1968)

General Nature of Hanoi's Winter - Spring Campaign

What was to be referred to as the Communist Winter-Campaign (WSC) or "general attacks, general uprisings" or Tet Offensive was launched in the early days of the Year of the Monkey (January - February 1968). These operations took the form of incessant and powerful attacks against practically all the cities and townships of South Vietnam.

Ten days before the campaign started the Communist High Command had ordered an unprecedental mortar and rocket attack against the Allied strategic base at Khe Sanh which was followed up with violent ground assaults on the besieged outpost. The action, which took place on 20 January 1968, propably was intended to divert the attention of the Vietnamese and U.S. High Commands away from what the Communists really had in mind.

A small locality near the Laotian and North Vietnamese borders and not very far from Con Tien where big battles had been recorded in mid-1967, Khe Sanh practically sits on the main infiltration routes that lead to the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam. The base itself is positioned in the middle of a square mile valley surrounded by high mountains. It was manned by about 6,000 U.S. Marines and a small contingent of South Vietnamese Rangers.

Khe Sanh was served by a small airport and could rely on three small outposts atop Hills 881, 861 and 1015 for advance warning of a major Communist thrust. To the east was Camp Carroll to the west Lang Vei, a small village, the defense of which was entrusted to a battalion of Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and a handful of American advisors.

The North Vietnamese attack on Khe Sanh resulted in 20 Leathernecks being killed and 109 wounded in the very first minutes of the battle. These casualties were mainly due to the lengthy artillery barrage against Camp Carroll which was followed by ground assaults against the troops on Hills 881 and 861. In this probe, the 26th Regiment of the Third Marine Division had its firts taste of the tactics of the 325th Division of the People's Army of (North) Vietnam (PAVN).

Face with the prospects of a big battle at Khe Sanh,

which might grow even bigger in view of the reported presence of another two PAVN divisions in that general area, the U.S. and Vietnamese High Commands reduced by twelve hours an original 48-hour Tet truce. Still, there would be no military activities on the part of the Allies from six PM January 29 to six AM January 31.

The Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) and MACV, however, took the precaution of ordering a series of measures for an effective defense of the two northernmost provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien. These included among other things the expansion of local garrisons to 50,000 men. Also an airborne task force was dispatched to Hue and elements of the U.S. 1st Airmobile Division were ordered North.

Prior to Tet only the Second and Ninth Airborne Battalions had arrived in the northern provinces. Only on the second day of the Year of the Monkey (Jan. 31), did the staff of the task force and the Seventh Battalion arrive in the former imperial capital. Meanwhile the U.S. Airmobile Division had arrived from An Khe but it took up a position from which it could not easily reach Hue. Both Vietnamese and U.S. reinforcements had been intended simply for relieving Khe Sanh in the event of major raids and thus did not get involved in local military operations.

At that time it was the general consensus of military strategists and tacticians that the Viet Cong were only capable of conducting large scale operations for a short time from bases of operation located along the borders. Any attacks of this nature were doomed to failure. With forces disposed in this way it was certain that the enemy could gain nothing of importance as the situation in progress so indicated.

As to the in-country operation, it was estimated in staff planning that the enemy force stationed within the country were able to mount multibattalion-size attacks aimed at creating repercussions within the population. They were only capable of launching attacks for short periods of time. Large scale or long term attacks doomed them to destruction.

The balance of forces as well as the general situation in South Vietnam, after the seesaw battles at Con Tien and Dakto and the friendly victories at Loc Ninh and Phuoc Qua, seemed to indicate a favorable trend that would ultimately result in the victorious conclusion of the war for the friendly side.

To knowledgeable observers of the Vietnamese scene, however, the situation was not at all certain. The problems of pacification remained very much unsolved. Enemy-controlled areas included a large percentage of the Vietnamese countryside. The V.C. infrastructure in various areas either remained intact or recorded an expansion that sometimes brought the enemy right to the fringes of big cities and townships.

In the final months of 1967 the situation was best reflected in the number of political assassinations and terrorist activities which were mainly aimed at government of Vietnam (GVN) administrative cadres at the village and hamlet levels. Taking advantage of the situation created by these incidents the enemy silently infiltrated arms and men into the most secure GVN areas.

Outwardly, however, the situation remained calm, thereby facilitating enemy troop movements throughout the land. At the approach of Tet, with the exception of Khe Sanh, a relative lull seemed to be prevailing all over South Vietnam. In the context of this situation leaves were readily granted the troops for the lunar New Year and measures were taken by the Administration to give the common people as normal a Tet as possible.

Premier Nguyen Van Loc, for example, signed an order authorizing the people to enjoy the practice of using firecracker in the four-day period ending February 2, as may be deemed fit by the local authorities. The sound of firecrackers could be heard in Saigon-Cholon over ten days before the New Year actually began. The people had forgotten about the dying war. They wanted to celebrate Tet with as much fervor as in the old days.

Perspectives

Looking back a couple of years one may have a better assessment of the Tet events. The War Cabinet of Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky was formed in mid-1965 amidst considerable popular expectations. The Vice Marshal and his colleagues were mostly young men whose personalities captured the imagination of the people.

Even in the early days of the Ky administration, revolutionary ideals and reforms no longer were viewed as distant, unreachable ideas. The Premier and his cabinet ministers insisted on being called Chairman of the Central Executive Committee and Commissioners General. The people were pleased to see cabinet members wear grey

khakhi uniforms with only one badge proclaiming their loyalty to the "Fatherland and People".

Titles and dresses naturally are no reflection of performance. The average person knew it but he also got the impression that there was something new in the political and administrative apparatus. The change could only be for the better for it marked a visible divorce from the feudal past.

The National Leadership Committee or Directory and the government called for austerity in the midst of a protracted war. A "New Society Day" was proclaimed on the occasion of the presentation of the war cabinet at Independence Palace. Hundreds of representatives from all popular strata were present.

These encouraging signs, however, were to prove little.

The war cabinet and the personality of its leader, Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, originated and tried to accomplish many big and continuing programs. For reasons unknown the administrative machinery failed to produce the results the average person hoped it would.

Ky remained in office until South Vietnam completed the formation of such basic democratic institutions as a Constitution, a bicameral Parliament, and a popularly elected President. These were no easy tasks for someone confronted with the many difficulties Ky had to face in the 1965-67 period. The most important of these, of course, was the so-called Buddhist Crisis in Da Nang and Hue which nearly brought about his downfall and the end of South Vietnam as a member of the community of nations.

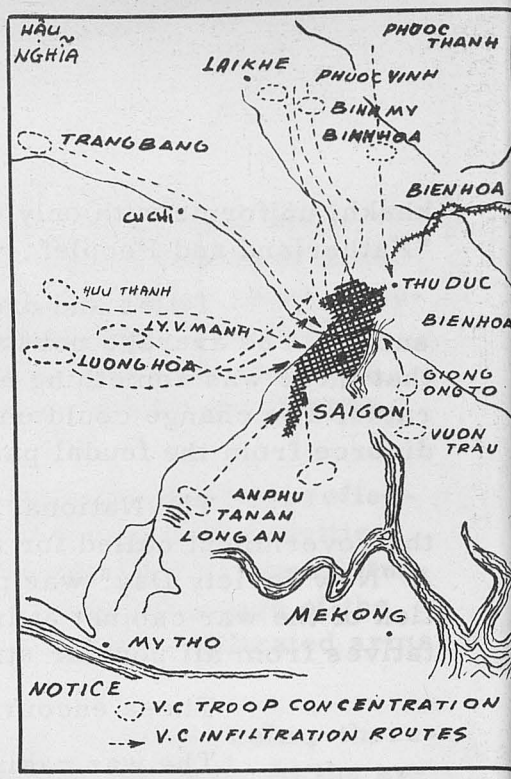
In addition to the Buddhist crisis there were many other internal difficulties which were reflected in the then-current press reports. There was so much infighting among the many pressure groups within the administration that no public figure stood out. No one leader could gain the support of the majority of the people.

As the Year of the Monkey approached, South Vietnamese society remained pretty much the same with a fun-loving tradition little altered by the war. This was all the more visible in the townships where little was known of the long conflict.

Indeed, for the city-dwellers, the war seemed to be as remote as the moon. They were sometimes reminded of its reality

Saigon Afire

VC troops start the greatest offensive campaign of the VN War amid fire-cracker explosions greeting the New Year.

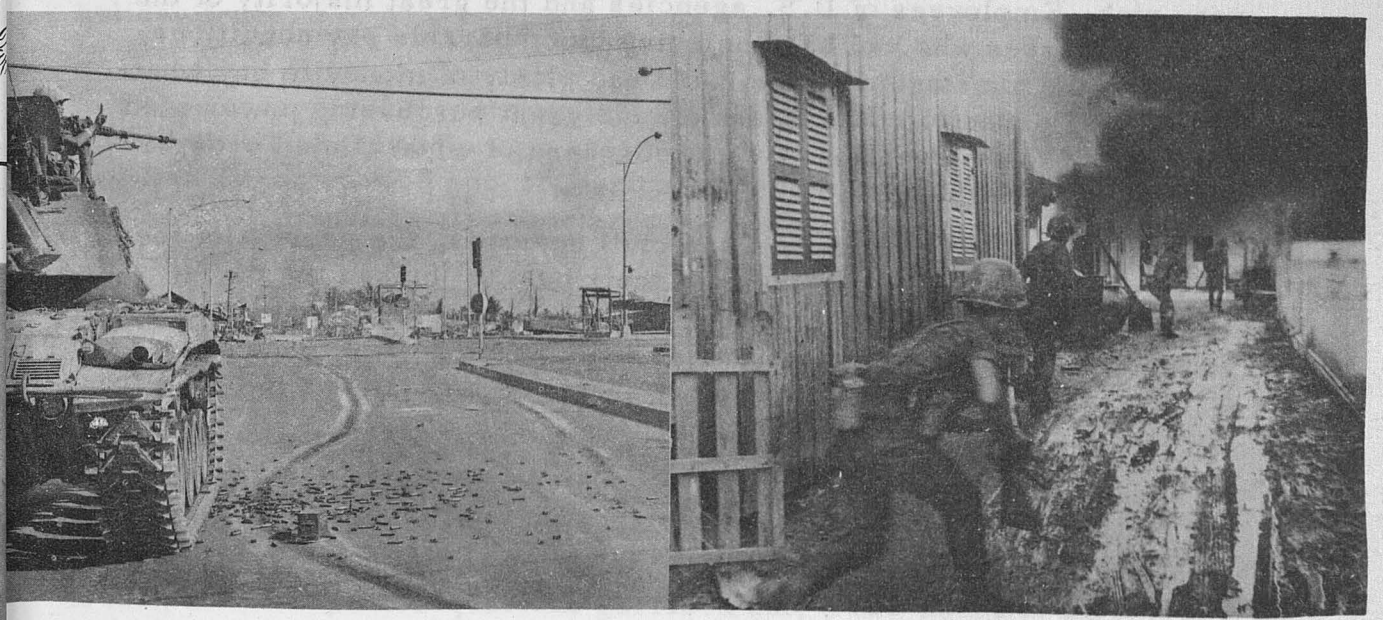


ENEMY'S INFILTRATION ROUTES INTO THE CAPITAL DURING TET





FROM PEACE





TO WAR

by the sight of long ammunition convoys and the sound of gunfire and bomb explosions. On the whole the terrible war had no dramatic impact on them beyond the effects of an inflationary spiral that only hit wage earners. The greater availability of money created a semblance of affluence unparalleled in the modern history of South Vietnam.

Tet was to give this apparently affluent society a golden opportunity to spend their money surplus. Two weeks before the traditional celebration time, hundreds of parties were given each night in Saigon without regard for their high costs.

The celebrations were not just limited to the rich and very rich. Employees of U.S. agencies and the great majority of the working classes who had been enjoying incomparable pay conditions, thanks to the shortage of labor, also had plenty of money to buy whatever they pleased. Prostitutes and their great purchasing power also contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of unparalleled prosperity..

Even servicemen and civil servants, the poorest of them all in the new social structure, did their best to joint in the buying spree unwilling to give their loved ones the impression that they had gone down the last step of the social scale. There were many cases of wage-earners pawning their most precious possessions in order to give their children a decent Tet.

Among the politically-conscious Vietnamese, many thought the critical situation of the land demanded a total divorce with past traditions and the initiation of new ways of life more compatible with the sacrifices and suffering of the majority. But their views were unheeded.

The face of society was one of rapid deterioration with traditional moral values swept aside while new ones had yet to be adopted. Homo homini lupus, each was only living for himself, trying his best to cope with the inflation while those with the opportunity to get rich fast continued to accumulate more wealth at the expense of the fighting men and the masses.

This crisis had its best reflection in the manner in which Tet was celebrated. When the Year of the Monkey arrived it was greeted with an unprecendented and uninterrupted explosion of firecrackers. Ten five-yard-long strings of fire-crakers could be seen hanging at the gates of many mansions. To share in the amount of luck of the new year, even the poorest among the poor also joined in the fun.

Suddenly, Last Spring Time

All of a sudden the sounds of big and small guns were heard in the midst of the ghost-scaring firecracker explosions. The peace of South Vietnam's secured areas was shattered. A series of wild and confusing battlelines were drawn through back gardens. The Communists achieved this feat because of the careless abolishment of the curfew and they did it through violating their self-proclaimed holiday truce.

On New Year's eve (night of 29-30 Feb.) the Viet Cong launched a series of thrusts against five localities. Qui Nhon was attacked at 0410 hours, Kontum at 0200, Pleiku at 0440, Darlac at 0130 and Nha Trang at 0035 hours. During that fateful night, a little before dawn, the Communists also mortared and penetrated the headquarters of I Corps in Danang. They also assaulted military installations in the small town of Hoi An, mortared the city of Quang Tri, the air base of Danang, and the neighboring Non Nuoc airport, while launching a series of ground attacks on many isolated outposts throughout the country.

The enemy was quite successful in the initial phase of his offensive campaign. In all the five townships mentioned above, his troops could be seen fighting in downtown areas. The V.C. pressure in Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Pleiku was eliminated rather quickly and it took the I Corps headquarters garrison only a few hours to dislodge the intruders. It took many days for the garrisoning troops in Ban-me-thuot and Kontum to get their situations completely under control.

A bare twenty-four hours after the first holiday strikes the Viet Cong launched a much larger offensive which concentrated on Saigon and the Mekong delta. In the meantime the central government had warned provincial authorities of an impending Communist offensive. On the very first day of the Year of the Monkey (Jan. 30), Radio Saigon denounced the Communists for their blatant violations of the holiday ceasefire and announced the abrogation of the truce order.

In the joy of Tet, nonetheless, little attention was paid to these developments. Particularly in Saigon, where members of local garrisons were ordered back to their barracks, there were many who failed to listen to the radio and did not have the slightest

idea what it was all about. In small provincial and district towns the authorities were more successful in communicating their orders to the local troops.

Che sara sara with the Viet Cong nation-wide offensive on and gaining momentum in the first hours of the campaign it was feared that Hanoi was about to realize its final objective of conquering South Vietnam. During the holiday period a total of 28 provincial capitals were attacked along with the sprawling metropolis of Saigon-Cholon. The following summarizes the situation.

In the nation's northermost provinces, militarily known as I Corps, the Communists attacked Hue at 0200 hours on 31 January, then followed up with similar assaults on Quang Tri, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai only two hours after the Hue push. In II Corps - the Highlands and the coastal provinces - Phan Thiet was hit at about the same time while the highland resort of Dalat was attacked during the early hours of 2 February.

In the provinces surrounding Saigon, militarily known as III Corps, the Communists also launched a series of well-coordinated attacks against vital military and political installations during the early hours of 31 January. The headquarters of the 25th Infantry Division in Hau Nghia province was assaulted the following morning. In the early hours of 1 February, installations in Binh Duong and Bien Hoa provinces were assailed. Long-Khanh was to be added to the list the following night.

In the Mekong Delta (IV Corps) Communist pressure was acutely felt in Phong Dinh, Vinh Long (1 Feb.), in Kien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Kien Giang, and Vinh Binh (2 Feb.), in Kien Tuong (4 Feb.), and finally at the headquarters of the 44th Special Zone at Cao Lanh in the early hours of 5 February. Go Cong was the target for another V.C. assault the following night and Bac Lieu was struck five days later.

Chronologically, the V.C. Tet offensive included the following actions :

Tet's Eve : Qui Nhon, Kontum, Pleiku, Darlac, and Nha Trang ; all these Cities are located either in the highland or central coast.

31 January : Saigon-Cholon, Gia Dinh, Can Tho and Vinh Long (III and IV Corps); Phan Thiet (II Corps); and Hue, Quang

Tri, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai (I Corps).

1 February : Kien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Go Cong, Kien Giang, Vinh Binh (IV Corps); Binh Duong and Bien Hoa (III Corps); On this day the enemy pressure lost some of its momentum throughout the country although in such places as Saigon, Hue, Ban Me Thuot, Kontum, My Tho and Vinh Long, the situation still could be described as dangerous. After sunrise, Kien Tuong town and a few garrisons in Long Khanh province were attacked but the assailants were quickly repulsed.

2 February : Dalat (II Corps).

3 February : Enemy activities definitely decreased throughout the nation. Only in Hue did the Communists continue their occupation of the Citadel. In other cities the insurgents sought security by hiding among the people but they were rooted out. On that and the following day they also attempted to attack the provincial town of Go-Cong and the headquarters of the 44th Special Military District. They failed.

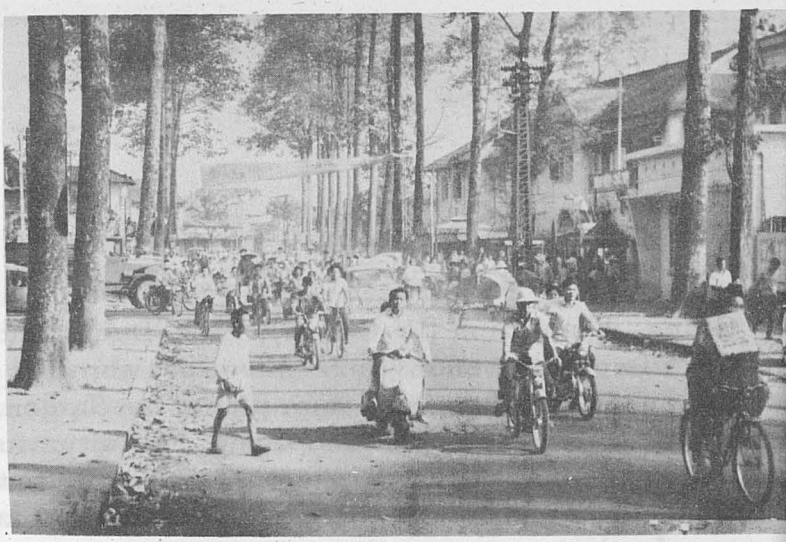
6 February : The situation in Hue, Saigon, and Can Tho continued to be a source of worry for military commanders. Particularly in Phong Dinh province, in the Mekong delta, V.C. pressure slowed down for a while, then became more intense in mid-February. In other parts of the country, especially in I and IV Corps, the Communists continued pounding populated areas with mortars and rockets.

7 February : For the first time in the war the Communists used tanks to attack an Allied position. A Communist armored column crossed the border from Laos and swept through the small village of Lang Vei near Khe Sanh. This brought about the collapse of the defensive system at Lang Vei. Only 72 of the defenders could get to Khe Sanh with the remaining 316 men considered either killed or missing. In the meantime U.S. marines joined the Battle of Hue and dislodged the Communists from the residential areas of the former imperial capital.

10 February : V.C. troops entered Bac-Lieu City and set afire an estimated 1,000 houses. Except for Saigon and Hue, all other South Vietnamese cities had been cleared of Communist troops by now. In Saigon, the fighting was located in the suburbs and in Hue it was in the areas of Cua Huu and the Bach Ho Bridge.

28 of the 48 cities and provincial towns of South Vietnam were attacked by the enemy. The remaining 20 only recorded a few

Evacuation











Refugees became a considerable problem for the South Vietnamese administration.

Thousands of people suddenly find themselves homeless refugees in their own towns





mortar attacks or small harassing actions and some were left completely alone by the Communists. A list of these towns and their situation follows :

Ninh Thuan (calm), Phu Yen (harassment on outskirt), Phu Bon (calm), Lam Dong (harassment at Di Linh MACV, 2 Feb.), Tay Ninh (mortared, 2 Feb.),Long An (mortared, 10 feb.), Hau Nghia (mortar attacks), Binh Long (calm), Phuoc Tuy (harassment on the outskirts), Phuoc Long (mortared, 7 Feb.), Kien Phong (mortaring of Cao Lanh, 2 Feb.), Ba Xuyen (mortaring of the airport at Soc Trang), Sadec (mortared, 10 Feb.), Chau Doc (mortared, 31 Jan.), An Xuyen (mortared, 31 Jan. and 6 Feb.), Chuong Thien, An Giang, Quang Duc and Binh Tuy (calm), Cam Ranh (calm).

Compared with other Tet targets the above provincial capitals are relatively unimportant. The enemy might have thought that success elsewhere would automatically yield victory in these minor localities. That is probably why regional Viet Cong troops were not used against small and isolated outposts but were deployed along with main force units to attack only target cities. The enemy must have reasoned that if these primary targets fell the secondary ones would necessarily be theirs.

Second wave

The Viet Cong general offensive lasted about two weeks. Communist activities slowed down either through friendly pressure or through their own tactical maneuverings. The very heavy losses suffered during the unprecedented two weeks of fighting put the Communists in the position of having to seek some respite and replacements for their depleted ranks. During the night of Saturday, the 17th of February, enemy troops once more made their presence felt throughout the country.

Unlike the Tet actions, however, it did not last long. Although enemy soldiers were seen on the outskirts of many of the nation's big cities and townships, the new Communist attack took the form of stand-off mortar and rocket fires rather than ground assaults. A total of 47 South Vietnamese and Allied installations were pounded. This makes the second wave a little different from the first, inasmuch as only GVN and South Vietnamese military installations were hit in the latter.

The mortar raids were followed by ground assaults

in such places as the Binh Loi Bridge area in Saigon, Thu Duc, Tan An, Go Vap, Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa and Chau Doc. The most important of these was against the city of Phan Thiet on the central coast. This followed by a couple of hours the Communist mortar and rocket bombardment of the Tan Son Nhut Air Base (0110 hour), the MACV headquarters (0120), the National Police headquarters on Tran Hung Dao boulevard, and the Phu Lam Radar Station.

On 25 February the enemy again mortared and attacked An Xuyen provincial town. His troops penetrated the city and barricaded themselves in the local hospital but were dislodged in the early hours of the following morning. At this time a significant Communist force once more tried to infiltrate into the sprawling metropolis of Saigon-Cholon but was stopped at Hoc Mon and Phu Tho Hoa to the northwest and west of the capital. The situation in Hue also came under control after 26 days of continuous fighting.

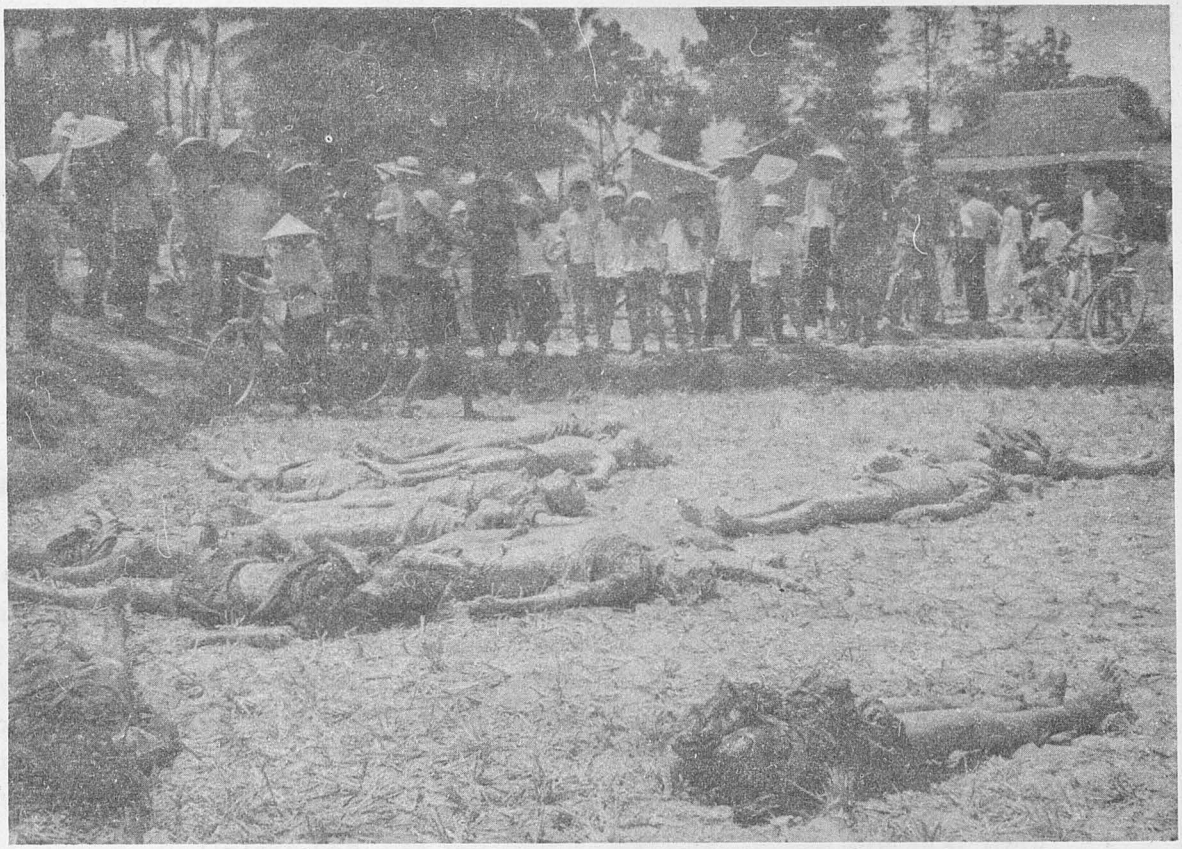
Hanoi made a big effort to pour arms and ammunition into South Vietnam while the V.C. offensive was on, especially over the sea. On 29 February, within two short hours (from 0100 to 0300), South Vietnamese and U.S. ships intercepted three North Vietnamese trawlers just off the coast of Duc Pho district in Quang Ngai province, Dam Van in Khanh Hoa province, and Bo De in An Xuyen province. In all three cases the Communist crewmen fought back vigorously but two of the trawlers were sunk and the third one pursued until it grounded and exploded.

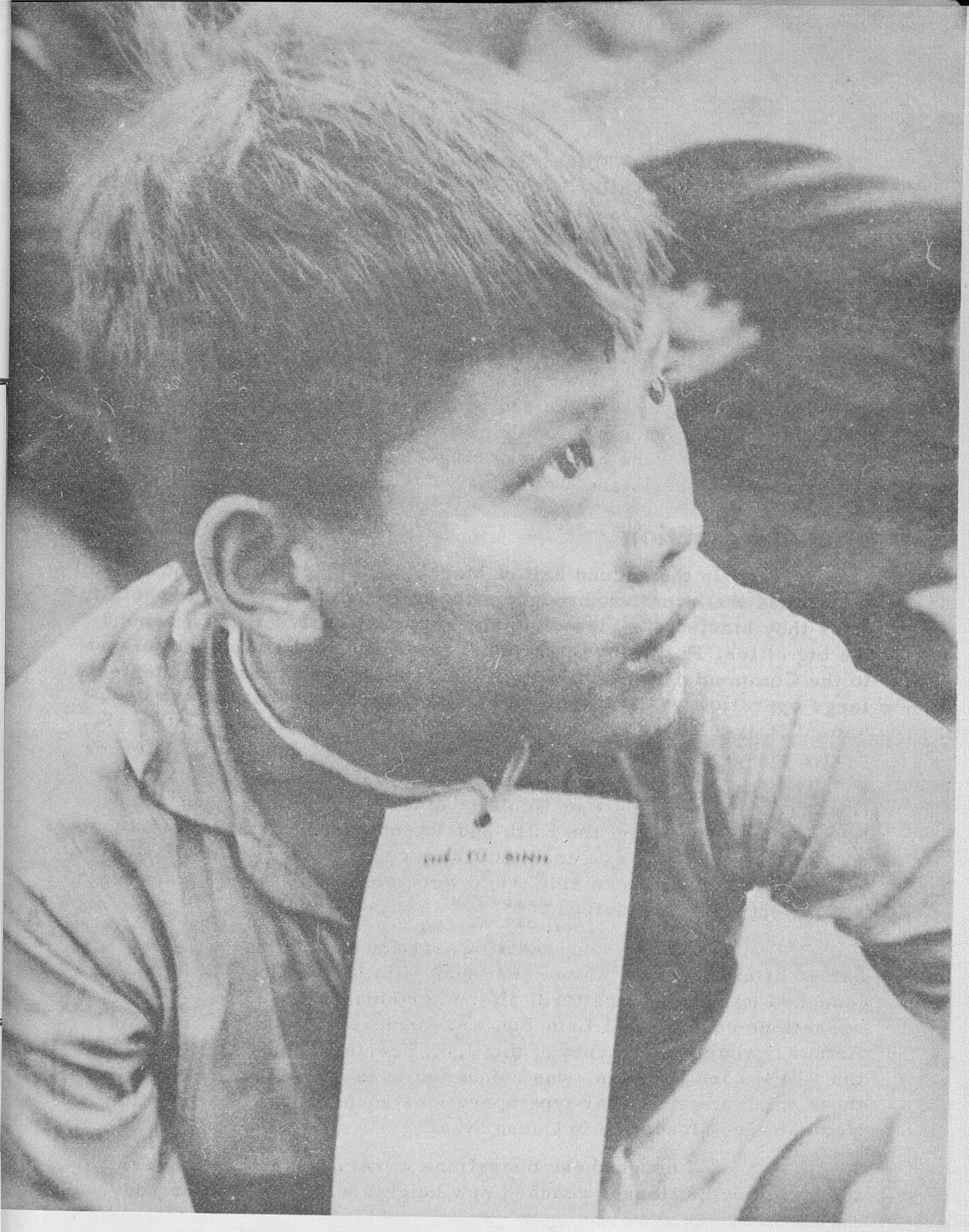
A total of 645 rifles, 45 sub-machine-guns and 13 machine-guns were captured in the vessel sunk off the coast of Quang Ngai. In the trawler grounded off the coast of Khanh Hoa province, some forty B.40 rocket launchers, 28 AK.50 rifles, and many cases of medicine made in eastern Europe and Communist China were confiscated. There were also 11 bodies found on the charred vessel. The following day (1 March), another three boats were either captured or sunk. They, too, contained an important quantity of arms and ammunition.

Following these defeats on the sea the Viet Cong again launched a third wave of assaults throughout South Vietnam. The main prong of this offensive action was in the western provinces of South Vietnam, especially the small provincial capital of Quan Long (Ca-Mau). V.C. gunners also mortared, for the first time, the airstrip at Cam Ranh, slightly damaging it. It was all the Communists could do. Despite their thrusts they failed to produce any results.

WHAT CRIME HAVE THEY COMMITTED ?

What motivated the Communist High Command to send these children to certain death ?





Nguyen Van Thang, 12, a member of the Quyet Thang Regiment, was captured by South Vietnamese Marines in Go Vap, on the outskirt of Saigon.

General William C. Westmoreland, U.S. Commander in Vietnam,in the meanwhile, had ordered the formation of a provisional Corps Command in I Corps and appointed General Robert E. Cushman to command it. This change was made to better prepare the troops for a possible North Vietnamese attack on Khe-Sanh.

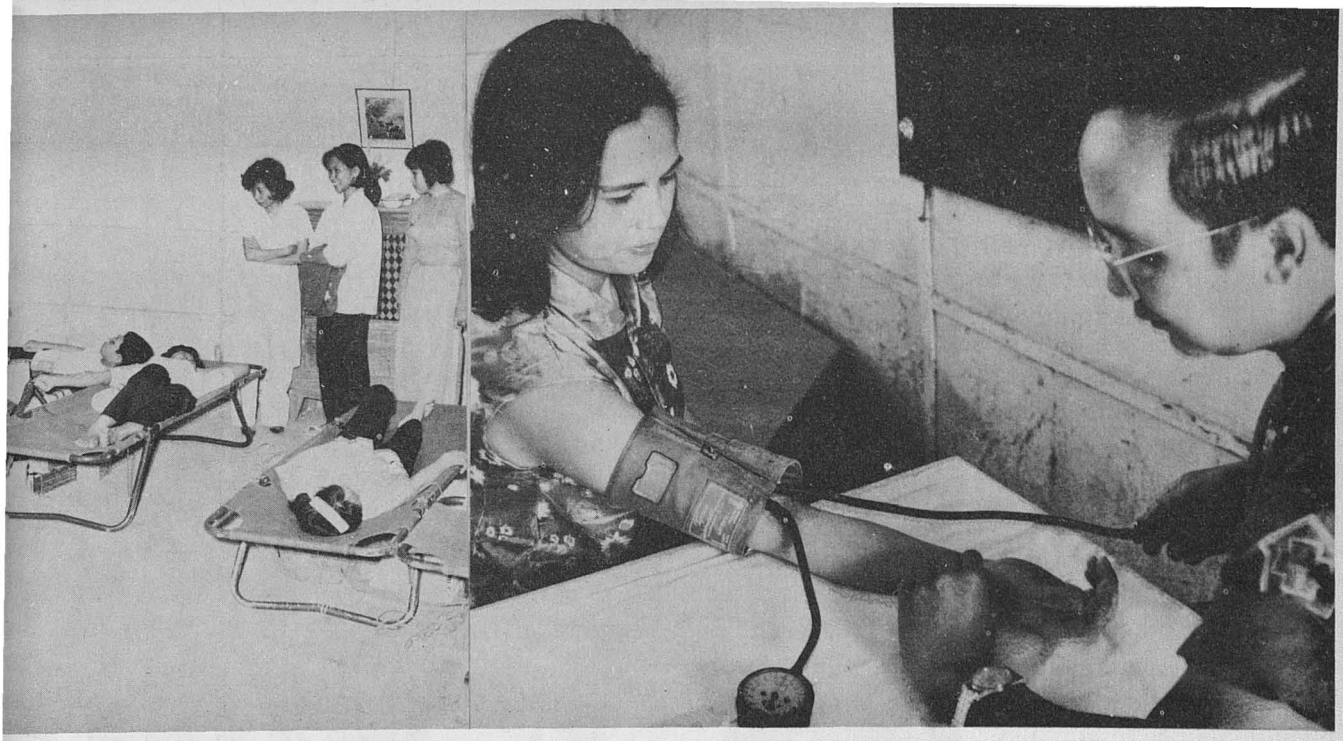
Little by little normalcy was restored in Saigon and other major cities throughout South Vietnam. The cost of living, which had spiraled during the heated days of February, did not go down. Although it was too early for most people to decide which side had won the first round of battles, the sad reality dawned that the South Vietnamese administration had another load on its shoulders. A great number of people were homeless refugees in their own towns and were badly in need of assistance.

Friendly reaction

In the second half of March South Vietnamese and Allied troops had the situation throughout the land under control - especially after they started a series of uninterrupted offensive sweeps around the big cities. Following Operation Tran Hung Dao, which put an end to the Communist presence within the capital city, an unprecedentedly large operation was launched on 11 March. This operation was code-named "Quyet Thang" (Winning Determination). It achieved little although grouping 50,000 troops from six divisions and two task forces in the five provinces surrounding Saigon (Gia Dinh, Long An, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong, and Hau Nghia). On the South Vietnamese side there were elements of the Fifth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry Divisions, an airborne task force, a marine task force, a ranger unit and some police. On the American side there were elements of the First, Ninth, and Twenty-Fifth Divisions.

In the Mekong Delta, Operation Truong Cong Dinh - named after a famous Vietnamese guerrilla leader in the 1860's - was launched on the same pattern. In the northern provinces a series of operations code-named Lam Son were ordered while Operation Mac Arthur, grouping elements of the U.S. Fourth Infantry Division and the ARVN 23rd Division, was conducted in the highlands. In addition there were other regular type operations such as Wallowa Wheeler in Nam Tin and Muscatine in Quang Ngai.

Although these operations were not exactly successful, total Communist losses reached new heights with each passing day.



Thousands of people both at home and abroad responded to the blood donation drive which was initiated when the Communists launched their Tet offensive.





View of a reception center during the Communist 'Tet' offensive.





Enemy casualties during the early weeks of the Tet offensive were particularly heavy but the Communist High Command somehow managed to pour into South Vietnam as many replacements as needed thus keeping their fighting strength at approximately the same level on practically all fronts.

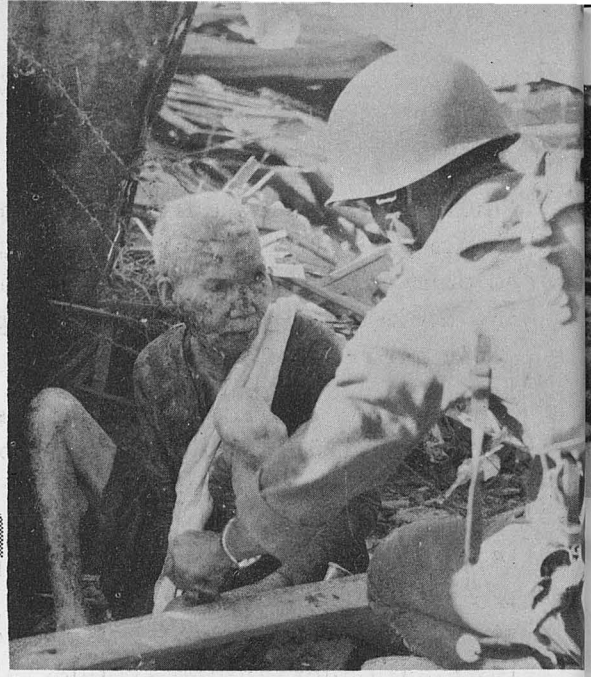
Prior to the offensive Communist strength was estimated around 323,000 troops of all types. According to a table of estimated Viet Cong strength early in March, the Communists lost about 45,000 men as follows :
18,600 combat troops, 4,000 support troops, 12,400 guerrillas, 5,000 political cadres, 5000 civilians and laborers. Communist strength after 29 February was estimated to be circa 283,500 broken out as follows : 110,600 combat troops, 33,700 support troops, 60,200 guerrilla, and 79,000 political cadres.

These troops were organized into 97 battalions and 18 companies. They were disposed in various corps areas roughly as follows : 35 battalions and 18 companies in I Corps, 28 battalions in II Corps, 15 battalions in III Corps, especially in the area of Saigon-Cholon, and 19 battalions in IV Corps.

Prior to their Tet offensive the Communists had plans for all eventualities. Should their attack fail,they would withdraw their troops to countryside areas bordering on the cities and continue with a loose "encirclement of the townships by the countryside",thus giving them the chance to recover. In addition they would also launch a few thrusts just to keep the Allies preoccupied with territorial defense everywhere while preventing them from mounting genuine offensive actions.

Commencing in March this strategy was to take the form of constant mortar and rocket attacks on the cities which were combined with a few incidental ground assaults of no particular importance.

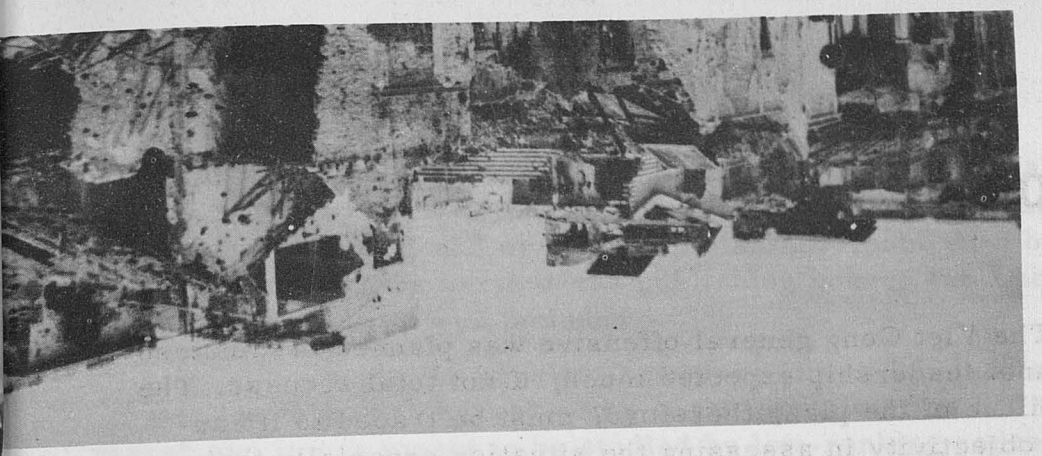
TERROR



That the enemy ground mortar and rocket attack could not lead to military victory was soon evide to many observers.

These attacks served as instruments of terror by means of which the Communists hoped to cow people into submission.





Destruction and death at the hands of their 'liberation'



Grandmother with the coffins of her daughter and her daughter-in-law.

The V.C. Offensive plan

The Viet Cong general offensive was planned in minutest detail. The Hanoi leadership expected much, if not total success. The reasons for failure of the plan, therefore, must be traced to its authors' lack of objectivity in assessing the situation, especially their misconception concerning their ability to achieve popular support.

The "general offensive, general uprising" actually began in the Spring of 1967 when Hanoi learned that American troops and their firepower were far superior to that which the French army could muster in the fifties and therefore no decisive victories on the pattern of past actions could be expected. In their review of the strategy for the conquest of the South the Hanoi leadership also came to the conclusion that continuation of the protracted struggle might not lead them anywhere, especially after a top secret group of military experts from North Korea, Communist China, and Cuba also expressed similar views.

In the ensuing months the North Vietnamese Politburo requested a basic change in the Communist strategy for South Vietnam. In its Resolution 13, victory was called for "in the shortest possible time". At about the same time, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, who had been serving as Commander-in-Chief of the Viet Cong forces and Lao-Dong (Communist) Party boss below the 17th Parallel, died. Vo Nguyen Giap, the victor of Dien Bien Phu, was made responsible for planning the Tet offensive.

Communist cadres in South Vietnam attended the first study sessions on the strategy to be adopted for the 1967-68 Winter-Spring Campaign as early as August 1967. In the course of these sessions, constant reference was made to a document entitled "For an Understanding of the New Situation and the New Tasks, "which was widely distributed in one form or another.

Booklet

A copy of this paper was found in Tay-Ninh province on 25 November 1967. The book consisted of ten pages and was dated 1 September 1967. Like all other such documents it has the appearance of a seemingly inoffensive brochure the true nature of which was

hidden under a cover that could be that of any booklet containing the teachings of Buddha. On that particular document was printed the title "Te Do Chung Sinh" or "To Help Mankind",published by Venerable Minh Tam. Even the name of the publishing house, the Luc Hoa Tang Publishing Company was included.

Inside the booklet, however, it was labeled "a study document for a better understanding of the new situation and the new tasks" and it was meant to be studied by low-ranking cadres and V.C. sympathizers. A close examination of this brochure shows four parts:

1. Objective : The V.C. seek the end of the American presence in South Vietnam through the formation of a coalition government with the National Liberation Front playing the leading role in the arrangement.

2. Three-Pronged Task : V.C. troops and cadres have the tasks of seeking the destruction of the U.S. political and military position, the collapse of the Vietnamese armed forces, and the promotion of a popular uprising.

3. Assessment : In assessing the situation in South Vietnam the V.C. maintain that the "search and destroy" tactics of the Allies have failed and that they themselves have achieved "great victories". They also point to the opening of the Tri-Thien (northern) front as an indicator of their success in preventing Westmoreland from directing more U.S. soldiers to the Mekong Delta and forcing him to ask for more troops.

4. V.C. Shortcomings : A number of shortcomings on the part of the Viet Cong also are enumerated such as the lack of coordination in big operations, their inability to expand guerrilla strength, the poor performance of some V.C. units, the insufficiency of political agitation, and the lack of popular support.

The document also specifies that if the U.S. should not agree to withdraw its troops from Vietnam and if it should not grant the Viet Cong the right to play a key role in a coalition government, the Communists would continue the fight. The struggle would take the form of intense large-scale attacks instead of the erstwhile tactics of protracted struggle so as to be conducive to victory within the shortest time possible.

The plan of attack, however, was not contained in this paper. It was to be contained in a plan code-named TCK-TKN - the

initial letters of the Vietnamese Tong Cong Kich, Tong Khoi Nghia or "General attacks, General Uprisings" - said to have been devised by General Vo Nguyen Giap himself in the fall of 1967. The Giap plan represented a complete divorce from the traditional Communist three phased blueprint for aggression and conquest.

In the first phase of the plan, which is also called one of preparation, the most important task of V.C. cadres is to start guerrilla warfare while trying to expand their political infrastructure in the countryside. In the second phase of the plan, cadres are ordered to intensify guerrilla warfare and start a war of movement while seeking the expansion of base areas and popular organizations. The final stage of a revolutionary war would be reached sometimes after the launching of the phase of general counter offensive which would culminate in the "takeover of political powers by the masses".

In the thinking of theoreticians of revolutionary warfare, a rebellion movement can only pass from one phase to another in due time and it would be dangerously unorthodox to skip one step. As things were in 1967 it was the view of most observers that the insurgent movement was still in the first stage. Against this context one has to try to see why Vo Nguyen Giap called upon his troops to achieve victory in the shortest possible time.

In October 1967, Giap, Le Duan, and Nguyen Duy Trinh stopped over in Peking on their way to Moscow to take part in the various events marking the 50th Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. It is now common knowledge that the North Vietnamese general sketched for his Chinese counterparts Hanoi's new strategy for a speedy conquest of South Vietnam. The Chinese at first balked at the idea but later changed their minds. They also promised Giap 100,000 support troops and 200,000 personnel for the maintenance of railroads and other communications systems so that more North Vietnamese troops might be freed for combat duties. Hanoi, however, only accepted a token number of these troops along with some 107mm and 240mm rockets and their launchers.

Moscow, on its part, promised help in the form of armored cars and other equipment items unavailable in China.

As Christmas 1967 approached, Lieutenant General Van Tien Dung, the Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese Armed Forces, dispatched what later was to prove his final instructions on the 1967-1968 Winter-Spring Campaign. About one week later, however, Hanoi

Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh talked about the possibilities of peace negotiations with the U.S. . Trinh's move possibly intended to mislead Washington on what the Hanoi leadership really had in mind.

A few days later Ho Chi Minh, over Radio Hanoi, read a four-line poem wishing the Vietnamese nation success in the coming Year of the Monkey. Students of Vietnamese history now agree that this poem contained Hanoi's order for the unprecedented offensive of 1967. Here follows the text of the poem with a rough translation :

" Xuân này hơn hẳn mấy xuân qua,
" Thắng trận tin vui khắp nước nhà.
" Nam Bắc thi đua đánh giặc Mỹ.
" Tiến lên !
Toàn thắng ắt về ta ! "

" This Springtime certainly will be more joyous than all such previous seasons,
" For news of victories will come from all parts of the country.
" North and South (our people and our soldiers) will compete in the anti-American struggle.
" Forward we go,
And total victory will be ours " .

On the surface no one would suspect the real intent of the message - an order for battle. This order was thought by most people to be simply a call for more sacrifices in preparation for great victories in the distant future. In reality the Viet Cong leadership used the poem as the basis for a study document detailing what the troops were expected to do when the TCK-TKN Plan was to be implemented.

Even though Giap's blueprint had not been made public in any way, interrogations of prisoners of war, political returnees and others, prior to and following the Tet attacks, revealed an idea of what it was. With its code name consisting of two parts "TCK" and "TKN", it was possibly conceived to include two phases : that of general offensive and that of general uprisings.

The TCK-TKN provided for simultaneous attacks against key targets throughout South Vietnam which would then be followed by political agitation conducive to an overthrow of the present administration and the formation of a new government. The plan also provided for an alternative in the event of a failure in the first phase. In that

event, the "general offensive,general uprising" would merely be another annual military campaign similar to those of previous years.

Bad failure

Militarily the TCK-TKN Plan turned out to be a very bad failure for the Communists.

In launching their Winter-Spring Campaign of 1967 the Communists wanted to forcefully turn world public opinion to their favour. They desired to create a psychology of fear among the South Vietnamese masses. At the same time they hoped to impose upon the Saigon administration the unbearable burden of sponsoring a refugee assistance program throughout the country.

The real purposes which prompted Hanoi to embark on the TCK-TKN campaign were not those outlined aboved. According to a high-ranking Viet Cong cadre, who was arrested while on his way to attend a session of the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), the reasons were of a military nature. Nam Dong, alias Can, told his interrogators that the TCK-TKN " was neither an ordinary campaign nor one staged with the intention of scoring a propaganda victory. It was a campaign designed to bring about a decisive victory and end the war".

According to Nam Dong, the strategy adopted was totally different from the classical Communist plan during the war against the French due to the following four considerations :

(1) France's military might was relatively weak while America's present strength is incomparable ; (2) In the War against the French, the victory of Dien Bien Phu was directly instrumental in bringing about the Geneva agreements. No such victories could be expected against the Americans; (3) With the classical three-phased strategy based on the principle of encirclement of the townships by the countryside, the Communists were steadily expanding their control over the countryside in the course of the first Indochina War. Against the U.S.-Vietnam alliance the traditional Communist strategy in the sixties failed to give Hanoi any decisive victories,thus keeping the war in pretty much the first phase of Mao Tse Tung's blueprint for revolutionary wars; (4) The Hanoi leadership also understood by 1967 that should the conflict go on for sometime it would attrite North Vietnam and bring about the collapse of the Communist regime.

In assessing the situation the Hanoi leadership also came to three sets of conclusions which prompted them to embark on the new strategic road. In the days immediately preceding the Tet offensive the Hanoi leaders thought that the South Vietnamese masses were ready to shift their allegiance to the Communists based on the mergence of such movements as the People's Salvation Movement, the various Buddhist struggle campaigns, and the constant division among nationalist parties. They also thought that the South Vietnamese disliked the Americans and were so unhappy with the war that they would rise up and overthrow the administration of President Nguyen-Van-Thieu.

Secondly, they thought the South Vietnamese regime had grown so weak following the downfall of Ngo Dinh Diem that its armed forces had ceased to be efficient, both in the defensive and the offensive. In the third place, they also must have reckoned, that following Viet Cong successes in 1966-67, the Communists really stood a chance of bringing an all-out offensive campaign to a successful conclusion - especially since they had the benefits of "two strategic opportunities and one tactical advantage".

The first strategic opportunity was the U.S. presidential election late in 1968. Candidates such as Richard M. Nixon and Robert Kennedy were criticizing President Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam policy and adding more oil to the antiwar fire in the U.S. The Hanoi leaders also must have thought that if the general attacks were to prove successful, the internal difficulties encountered by the outgoing administration would make it impossible for Johnson to send reinforcements to South Vietnam and reduce it to seeking negotiations on conditions favorable to the Communists.

The second strategic opportunity was the mounting anti-U.S. feeling around the world which could be traced to its participation in the Vietnam war. Again, in Hanoi's view, a series of big victories would result in the crystallization of such current of public opinion, demanding an end to the protracted Vietnam crisis, that Washington would find it impossible to resist.

In addition since both sides had proclaimed a stand down in war activities, there was a significant tactical advantage to be gained from the surprise attacks to be mounted during the holiday season.

The Communist High Command, of course, was fully

confident that it's plan would be successful but it also took comfort in two possible developments in the event the master plan of Vo Nguyen Giap failed. Giap reportedly thought that the insurgent movement was firmly entrenched in the jungle and countryside of South Vietnam. He thought that even if the offensive against the cities should turn into a debacle, its strength would remain unchanged.

Giap also reckoned that the offensive campaign would perforce result in many casualties on the attackers but this would not be too serious since North Vietnam's source of manpower would remain intact in spite of the pounding of its territory from the air. In Giap's calculation the ability of Hanoi to replace casualties was about three times greater than Saigon's, that of North Vietnam plus one half of South Vietnam.

With the TCK-TKN Plan, Communist commanders hoped to derive maximum advantage from the limited number of combatants they could field. They hoped to take some of the key military installations and, with the help of popular uprisings, to take over the administration of the land. They also thought that in the face of such a completely novel situation the Americans would be reduced to throwing in the towel as they would find themselves in the impossible situation of using airpower against such populated areas as Saigon with its 3,000,000 people.

Moreover they must have reckoned that with the emergence of a new "government", all undefeated Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units would have to surrender. In the case of hard-core GVN, they would reduce them one by one militarily or would proselyte them with the help of military dependents and Communist sympathizers.

The Communist High Command deployed many of their best political cadres in their attacks against the cities and townships with the hope of fostering several disturbances leading to the formation of a new administration. They especially launched a new movement called the National Alliance of Peace and Democratic Forces (NAPDF) which purportedly was a front grouping all political parties and factions in South Vietnam.

The new front was nothing but another organization created and directed by Hanoi pretty much the same way the National Liberation Front (NLF) was launched some years before. Conscious of the fact that the NLF was too closely identified with it, the Hanoi regime

sought, in mid-1967, to give the NLF a new image allowing it to publish a new political program. This was decided to enlarge the political base of the NLF organization but the move did not fool many people.

NAPDF, along with the Winter-Spring Campaign, was given much publicity by the Communist propaganda media in an effort to attract the support of the intellectuals in the cities and give the Communist movemer an honorable appearance in the event of the formation of a coalition government. In the capital city of Saigon, NAPDF did not have the time to do anything. It was later learned that its Central Executive Committee included such figures as Attorney Trinh Dinh Thao (chairman), Mr. Lam Van Tet, and Venerable Thich Don Hau of the Buddhist struggle movement in Hue. In the former imperial capital the local NAPDF organization was more successful. It was presented to the public and had enough time to be at the origin of quite a few disturbances.

The TCK-TKN Plan was such a detailed plan that it also provided for the spreading of a rumors. According to one such rumor, NLF troops would only attack South Vietnamese installations and units and would leave the Americans alone in keeping with the terms of a secret agreement between the Viet Cong and the U.S. In reality V.C. troops tried their best to avoid attacking U.S. installations. That fact, following the pre-Tet rumors and developments, created some uneasiness in U.S. - South Vietnamese relations.

A few months before Tet, at about the same time Nguyen Duy Trinh disclosed North Vietnam was ready for negotiating an end to the conflict, some NLF representatives reportedly arrived in Saigon to contact the U.S. Embassy. One of the Viet Cong emissaries, it was widely believed then, was captured by police. In the ensuing days, Police Director General Nguyen Ngoc Loan reportedly submitted his resignation in protest of U.S. interference in internal South Vietnamese affairs. The rumor went that the Council of Ministers refused to consider Loan's request and asked him to stay on.

According to the same rumor, South Vietnamese inflexibility toward the Viet Cong was instrumental in Washington's secret acquiescence to allow Communist troops to pass and attack GVN installations. By the same reasoning, such a direct confrontation between the fighting brothers would give the Americans the golden opportunity of assessing the capabilities of the Viet Cong vis-a-vis their South Vietnamese allies so that a really practical approach could be

devised to a possible negotiated settlement of the war.

This rumor, it goes without saying, was groundless. The U.S. High Command was genuinely taken aback by the scale of the Tet attacks which were directed against 28 cities and towns. No such developments had been foreseen in any of Washington's many contingency plans. More often than not U.S. troops, even without being directly challenged, joined in the battles on the side of their South Vietnamese comrades. Only in some instances did the lack of communications and the confusing situation prevent U.S. troops from coming to the assistance of their South Vietnamese allies in the first days of the V.C. offensive.

Apparently, all these moves - offer of peace talks and secret contacts - were merely intended to give the Americans the impression that all was not well in the Hanoi-Viet Cong association. While proclaiming Hanoi's intention to seek a negotiated settlement of the war, Nguyen Duy Trinh possibly only sought to mislead U.S. public opinion and Washington officials on what the North Vietnamese leader really had in mind. They sought to establish preliminary contacts with America so that it would speedily lead to a full fledged parley in the event of a successful general offensive.

The Communists' failure to bring pressure on U.S. installations throughout the land might simply have been the result of a shortage of combat troops but it might also have been a premeditated move to sow dissension between the Americans and the South Vietnamese, a move to create a feeling of insecurity among GVN troops and convince the common people in the cities that they had nothing to fear in joining the ranks of the revolution, especially at a moment when the war was raging in downtown sections of all population centers.

Implementation

Now let us have a look at how the TCK-TKN Plan was implemented.

For many weeks prior to the Tet holiday the enemy had infiltrated a considerable amount of arms and ammunition into the cities and townships of South Vietnam. This was done in a million ways but one of the most successful methods was to fill the lower part of trucks with deadly weapons and explosive and put atop of these all such Tet supplies as water melons. Invariably such simple tricks turned out to be so effective that not a single case of arms smuggling.

was found by Police.

The interrogation of prisoners in the ensuing days was to reveal that in quite a few instances war materiel was hidden in truckloads of sand and kept under sand mounds until H-hour, when it was easily retrieved. In other cases Viet Cong city workers hid their deadly instruments in coffins and buried them in various strategically located cemeteries. As the moment arrived for going onto the offensive, they dug them up and used the cemeteries as gathering points for operating troops.

The enemy High Command also had hundreds of cadres in each township. Each of these had his own mission, as part of the greater scheme. Let it simply be said that Communist infiltrators knew exactly where to go when they arrived in town, how to enter into contact with their commanders, and what to do while awaiting H-hour. More particularly, sapper troops were told to prepare carefully for the coming battles as the Communist High Command was convinced that the outcome depended to a great extent on the performance of these elite troops.

As Tet approached, thousands of Viet Cong soldiers openly entered the cities disguised as civilians and armed with fake identification papers of all sorts. These Viet Cong were feted by local sympathizers and Communist representatives and were taken to their respective targets for on-the-spot studies prior to attacking them.

A reconstruction of the Viet Cong plan of battle indicated the following three principles guiding their efforts everywhere :

I. Targets selected for the initial phase of the campaign must be key military and administrative installations where the Communist High Command can rely on sapper units, either previously infiltrated or kept on city fringes, to conduct the attack. These units must be well equipped with B.40 and B.41 individual rocket launchers and automatic rifles of the AK family. They hoped to overcome possible resistance speedily by use of surprise attacks.

2. While sapper troops were attacking from within, additional pressure would be brought to bear on the Allies from the outside, especially in the form of artillery bombardments. The attack on Saigon, however, was made an exception with the assailants refraining from using their big guns against this populated area.

3. In addition to the military prong of the attack, the

The Viet Cong call this the "one point, two front" tactic while western strategists term it "feint".

Casualties

Although casualties do not constitute the most reliable measure by which to assess the success or failure of a military campaign in the Vietnam war, a comparison of losses suffered by both sides during the crucial months of February and March - the first phase of the Viet Cong Tet offensive - may give an indication of the general trend of the situation.

Following are figures of losses recorded by the Joint General Staff of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces for the first phase of the Viet Cong Winter-Spring Campaign (February-March 1968). This period was marked by the unprecedented attacks on the cities of South Vietnam during the lunar New Year. These figures also include the second wave of assaults which began 17 February as well as the various smaller actions recorded until the end of March.

1. Friendly Losses :

	February	March
(a) South Vietnamese Personnel		
Killed in Action	3,501	1,453
Wounded in Action	10,678	4,419
Missing in Action	543	383
TOTAL	14,722	6,255
(b) Allied Personnel (mostly U.S.)		
Killed in Action	2,832	1,292
Wounded in Action	15,832	3,453
Missing in Action	352	252
TOTAL	19,016	4,997
(c) Weapon Losses (GVN only)		
Crew-Served Weapons	106	78
Individual Weapons	1,418	741
TOTAL	1,524	819
(d) Aircraft Losses (inland) (1)		
Completely Destroyed	63	60
Heavily Damaged	154	60
Slightly Damaged	99	116
TOTAL (2)	316	236

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2. Enemy Losses :

(a) NVA and VC Personnel	February	March
Killed (by body count) . . .	41,181	17,192
Captured	7,391	2,070
TOTAL	48,572	19,262
(b) Weapon Losses		
- Captured by RVN Troops :		
Crew-Served Weapons . . .	1,504	837
Individual Weapons	3,241	1,646
- Captured by Allied Troops :		
Crew-Served Weapons . .	1,419	491
Individual Weapons . . .	5,838	2,463
TOTAL	12,002	5,437

Though the losses reported by both armies were considerable the casualties suffered by the civilian population were dramatic. Although no accurate statistics are available there were approximately 14,300 killed, 24,000 wounded, 72,000 houses destroyed, and 627,000 persons made homeless.

Destruction was nation-wide but it differed greatly from one part of the country to another. In the northern provinces (I Corps), where an estimated 5,500 North Vietnamese attacked the former imperial capital of Hue and occupied its citadel for 26 days, an estimated 4,350 civilians were killed including 2000 citizens of Hue and another 4,500 were wounded in the conflagration. As two-thirds of Hue was totally destroyed, some 90,000 people out of a total population of 130,000 were made refugees in their home town. Trade and commerce

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(1) Included here are aircraft of all types lost due to enemy mortar attacks, ground fire, or for technical reasons.

(2) Of the February toll, 68 aircraft were shot down, 32 lost for technical reasons, and 205 destroyed or damaged while on the ground. Of the March toll, 38 were shot down, 67 lost for technical reason, 116 destroyed or damaged in the course of enemy mortar attacks, five in the course of ground assaults, and ten were lost for unknown reasons.

in I Corps declined by at least 20 per cent.

In the highland and coastal provinces (II Corps),less destruction was reported than elsewhere. About 1,100 civilians were killed and an estimated 4,000 wounded while the numbers of houses completely destroyed or partially damaged were given as 12,000 and 4,000 respectively. The status of roads in this part of the country revealed no significant changes. Prior to and following Tet,large convoys still needed an escort element for their security.

The impact of the Communist general offensive was much less evident in provinces surrounding Saigon (III Corps). Here the Government controlled up to 82 per cent of the population before Tet and the Viet Cong only about five per cent. Except for Saigon there were only 188 civilians dead, about one thousand wounded, and 10,000 houses destroyed in all of III Corps. In the area of Saigon, however, there were 6,300 civilians killed, 11,000 wounded and a total of 19,000 houses destroyed,creating over 206,000 refugees.

In the Mekong Delta (IV Corps) some 1,300 dead and 3,700 wounded were listed among the civilian population. Prior to Tet, there had been only 14,000 refugees in all of IV Corps but this was to be brought to 170,000 after the Communist attack. Immediately following these attacks communication on land experienced some difficulties but transportation on rivers and canals continued to be quite satisfactory. Shortages of rice were reported only in very exceptional cases.

In closing,it can be said that eleven towns and cities suffered extensive damage. They were Kontum, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot, My Tho, Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Chau Doc, Can Tho, Saigon, Hue and Phan Thiet.

The May Offensive

The second phase of the Communist Winter-Spring Campaign, which journalists were to call "the May Offensive", was launched 5 May 1968.

Following their failure to achieve anything of lasting effect in the first days of the Tet attacks, the Communists launched a second wave of attacks on 17 February with the apparent aim of emulating their comrades in Hue who were still maintaining a hold on the former imperial capital. The assaults were aimed mainly at Saigon but enemy troops were stopped at the gates of the capital. Also on 5 March the insurgents shelled many South Vietnamese cities but this last attempt aroused only minor interest. From 5 March until the beginning of the second phase of the offensive, enemy activities followed their usual pattern and intensity.

The South Vietnamese administration reacted most cautiously taking additional precautionary measures for the defense of potential target areas, especially Saigon. Immediately after the first wave of attacks a curfew was placed in effect throughout the territory. As early as 28 February, Prime Minister Nguyen Van Loc signed a decree stopping the demobilization of all conscripts and recalling all reserve elements.

Beginning in March all male teaching staffs between the ages of 18 and 45 were ordered to go through some military training. They were to be followed by university students and senior high school pupils. The youths were also organized into units ready to take part in the defense of their home towns.

In many provincial capitals self-defense groups were formed upon the initiative of the local authorities. These were to be later incorporated into a nation-wide movement called the People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF). At the same time political parties and organizations also showed a renewed interest in organizing themselves into an effective anti-Communist instrument. The National Salvation Front (NSF) was created and it soon elected a steering committee under the chairmanship of Senator Tran Van Don. While President Nguyen Van Thieu was considering the advisability of ordering general mobilization and drafting all men between the ages of 18 and 40, the 600,000 strong Armed Forces were put on a state of full alert. Troops were also ordered to strengthen their defensive positions.

The most pressing task was to assist war victims. President Thieu, in an address to the nation on 2 February, started a month-long fund-raising campaign to which each government employee and serviceman contributed one-thirtieth of his monthly pay. The central Relief Committee was made the responsibility of Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky.

These measures, as well as what the common people had witnessed during the battles in the cities, resulted in a most encouraging development. From a peaceful situation in which people had been complacent enough to believe the country was safe, life in the cities was exposed to intense and sudden dangers. Awareness of the real situation and seeing the fighting spirit of government soldiers made them feel more confident in the possibility of defeating the enemy.

The new psychological reality was most evidently reflected in the attitude of the young generation in response to callup orders. Prior to Tet it was a matter of public knowledge that Vietnamese youths dreaded nothing more than being drafted into the Army. Following the V. C. attacks on the cities, thousands of draft-aged boys did not even wait for individual callup papers. Tens of thousands joined the Army voluntarily.

Within one month following the Communist attacks the Vietnamese Army not only had enough replacements for its depleted ranks but also found most of its manpower problems solved, as if by magic. Most units became overstrength after years of being understrength. In addition to former servicemen and new recruits, who voluntarily joined in the fight, quite a few delinquent servicemen imprisoned for petty crimes were given the chance to redeem themselves if they should volunteer for combat duties. Many of them did.

Another encouraging sign was the equipping of all combat troops with the new M. 16 rifles. With this new standard weapon, South Vietnamese troops not only attained much better individual firepower but seemed also to acquire a new fighting spirit that had been lacking with the obsolete M. 1.

New peace path

Against this background of renewed confidence U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered a partial bombing halt over North Vietnam as a first gesture of goodwill to entice the Hanoi leaders to come to the conference table. The decision was made public on 31 March 1968 and was universally hailed as a courageous move.

America, however, understood that the Vietnam conflict could only be brought to an honorable end with Allied troops keeping up pressure against the enemy while its diplomats tried to reason with Hanoi. On 1 April a big sweep was launched to break the Communist noose around Khe-Sanh with the participation of the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

Airmobile troops immediately occupied some of the hills dominating National Route 9 while other Allied infantrymen, supported by armored elements, pushed in the direction of Khe Sanh. The 20,000 man column did not meet with much Communist resistance and it reached the besieged outpost on 5 April, ending a 76-day siege.

The following day Washington officially entered into contact with Hanoi and two days later received a reply from the North Vietnamese regime. Both sides publicly claimed willingness to take part in a peace conference but the matter of a site for the talks was to delay its opening for a month. Hanoi suggested Poland or Cambodia while Washington proposed Ceylon, Japan, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Italy, Belgium, Finland or Australia.

The war continued pretty much along the same pattern in Vietnam. In the early days of April a Viet Cong Colonel, by the name of Tam Ha, rallied to the Government. He told his interrogators that the Communists were preparing for the Second Phase of the general offensive which again had the capital as its main target.

In the words of Tam Ha : "about ten thousand Viet-Cong troops are preparing for an attack on Saigon on 22 April but may postpone it to a later date . The attacking force consists of two regiments of the CT. 9 Division, two regiments of the CT. 5 Division and another two regional regiments the 165th and the Đong-Nai Regiments. For the attack on the capital CT. 9 elements will open a front to the northwest of Saigon with the main effort concentrated on Tan Son Nhut Airport. Elements of the CT. 5 Division will attack from the west and south. All important targets have been selected including military installations, power

stations, and other key agencies''.

Army units in Saigon immediately were put in state of 100 per cent alertness. While additional precautionary measures were taken in the Capital Military District, U.S. airmobile troops were dispatched to the Ashau Valley which was known to contain an important depot of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). In this operation over 200 helicopters were deployed on 28 April. Right after this,a South Vietnamese airborne task force was dispatched to join in the battle. Although Communist resistance was weak their anti-aircraft fire was so very intense that 30 of the helicopters were downed. This, however, was more than adequately compensated by the weapons and ammunition confiscated by the sweeping troops.

U.S. diplomats continued to meet with their North Vietnamese counterparts in Laos in an effort to reach an agreement on the site of the proposed parley. The many meetings between U.S. Ambassador William H. Sullivan and Nguyen Chan, the General Representative of North Vietnam in Vientiane, finally resulted in a communique issued on 3 May proclaiming the choice of Paris as the site for the preliminary talks between Hanoi and Washington.

The first session of the parley was fixed for 10 May. In the meanwhile both sides had made public the composition of their delegations. On the American side, W. Averrell Harriman was selected to head the peace mission. Mr. Harriman was to be assisted by Cyrus Vance, Special Adviser to the U.S. President, General Andrew Goodpaster,and Mr. William Jordan. Jordan was a leading specialist for Vietnamese affairs on the staff of the National Security Council and also performed the functions of Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs.

On the North Vietnamese side the Hanoi delegation was to be headed by Minister of State Xuan Thuy who reportedly would have the assistance of Colonel Ha Van Lau, Nguyen Minh Vy, Nguyen Thanh Le, and others. Lau had served for many years as Chief of the North Vietnamese Delegation in charge of liaison with the International Control Commission. Le was also to serve as official spokesman for the Communist team.

The Paris Conference finally came into being but the war in Vietnam also increased in intensity. Although it was the view of practically all knowledgeable observers that the conflict would not die down, they did not agree on how and when and where it would be fought.

One had to wait until the eve of May Day to see a first indication of the new face of the war.

On that day a big explosion was heard in Saigon, rocking the downtown section of the Vietnamese capital. The Viet Cong had tried to blow up the television center with over one hundred pounds of TNT hidden in a taxicab. It exploded at 1300 hours killing three persons, wounding another thirty , and destroying a house near the TV station but leaving the center intact. For many the explosion was the signal for an offensive campaign against Saigon to be launched the following day.

A bare 24 hours after it was known that U. S. and North Vietnamese representatives were to meet in Paris, Viet Cong troops hit the capital city of Saigon. The attack started at 0310 hours on May Day with a series of indiscriminate shellings of population centers which were to be followed by ground attacks in many places.

The May offensive was to last a full week. Enemy troops could only penetrate the outlying areas of the capital. Everywhere the attackers were repulsed or exterminated within seven days. On 25 May they tried to stage a comeback. This time they tried to enter the capital city through the Dong Ong Co and Binh Hoa areas just north of Saigon. Occupying many civilian houses they resisted sweeping government troops dispatched after them. In Cholon the Communists also succeeded in penetrating a few blocks of the Sixth Precinct. From the concrete buildings of this precinct they tried to oppose the advancing South Vietnamese. A series of fierce and bloody engagements took place in both areas.

New V.C. Strategy

In their first attempt at mounting a general offensive the Communist High Command deployed assault troops everywhere but they soon recognized that this move was a grave mistake. Attacks can only be mounted when the assaulting troops are more numerous than the defenders. Should the contrary be true, failure would be more apt to result. Moreover, without air support, the Communists could only hope for victory if they outnumbered friendly troops in target areas. The only way to achieve this was to assault them repeatedly.

Recognition of this truth shook Communist commanders out of their dreams for a speedy victory and they selected the cities - especially Saigon - as the targets of the new offensive campaign. In their reckoning nothing would be more effective than keeping strong military pressure on Saigon for such a strategy would perforce result in an atmosphere of growing confusion in the political nerve-center of South Vietnam and be a propaganda victory of sorts abroad.

In their May offensive the Viet Cong strategy was reduced to the following five points : (a) to avoid frontal attacks on friendly installations; (b) to infiltrate populous areas, especially during the hours of darkness and wherever friendly troops were thinly deployed; (c) to stay in an occupied area and fight until the end regardless of damages; (d) in the absence of friendly reaction to spread to neighboring areas and request reinforcements; and (5) to rely on sapper troops as much as possible so that V.C. military pressure should be felt by the friendly troops both from within and without.

In the troubled days of May numerous enemy troops penetrated such areas as Thi Nghe, Bay Hien, Minh Phung, Binh Thoi, Binh Tien and Pham The Hien. Although government units were successful in preventing the Communists from spreading to other areas, they had to call in air and artillery support to eliminate the intruders and get the situation under control.

The intention of the enemy High Command, of course, was not to achieve big military victories but to create a state of confusion that could lead to immense political and economic difficulties and bring about opportunities for overthrowing the elected government of South Vietnam. In this undertaking the Communist High Command

seemed to have relied militarily on guerrilla warfare tactics, amended to some extent to fit the conditions of city fighting.

One week after the May offensive was started Communist intruders were swept out of Saigon. On 25 May they were back. They infiltrated from the Northern outskirts of Gia Đinh and the Southern outskirts near the "Y" bridge. They again applied the tactics of hugging populated areas and from these to strike at sweeping government troops.

In this second attempt enemy units fully exploited the shortcomings of friendly security belts. Enemy presence was only discovered after they had penetrated the city's outlying areas. North Vietnamese troops took the trouble of occupying such key points as big buildings, factories, churches and temples before going on the attack in any area. They also used such open areas as parks and cemeteries where they speedily dug trenches and other defensive installations.

After securing the occupation of a target area the intruders would immediately ask for reinforcements. The new troops would take advantage of darkness to move in by small groups. These troops, however, were extremely well-equipped and their firepower was comparable to that of any such formation in the world.

The composition of these groups were mostly troops that had had some rest after a previous attempt against the big city. In principle they were to take turns in attacking Saigon so that the V. C. military pressure might be constantly maintained against this political center. Also, in their effort to bring guerrilla warfare to the cities, Viet Cong troops unable to resist friendly pressure in one area would move to another and start the whole process all over again.

In adopting such a strategy the Communist High Command was willing to accept some casualties in exchange for the understandably heavy losses friendly troops would suffer in attacking the buildings Communist troops had turned into strongholds. On the whole the enemy did not concentrate his troops but divided them into many squad-size groups with the instruction to fight until the end.

Against this background one understands why the advancing friendly troops met with so many difficulties and in some cases had to call in air power and artillery. They were not the only ones to resort to artillery and bombs against populated areas. The Viet Cong, while continuing the second wave of attacks, pounded residential areas with

thousands of 122mm rockets and 82mm mortar rounds, sowing death and terror among the population.

In summary, the Communist High Command had changed its strategy in a most unmistakable manner. During the Tet offensive enemy troops attacked government and military installations in an effort to create propitious conditions for the dispatch of political cadres to the cities where they could incite the people to overthrow the legal administration. In both Communist pushes in May, the tactics employed aimed at a protracted occupation of territory while reducing casualties on the basis of lessons learned from past offensives. The enemy did not mortar population centers indiscriminately during Tet while in May tension was kept high with constant bombardments of the cities.

Should one compare these two campaigns one would come to the conclusion that the Tet offensive was launched with the intention of achieving a quick victory. After the Tet failure the second offensive was started with a combination of ground assaults and air attacks which had little chance of leading to a military victory of any proportion. What the enemy really sought in this second attempt was to subvert the South Vietnamese administration politically and economically and to give the common people the feeling that all was lost and that anything would be better than their present predicament.

These attempts, however, failed to produce anything of lasting consequence. In the face of strong allied reactions most V. C. soldiers lost courage. With morale problems increasing tenfold along with the number of dead among their ranks, many Communist troops sought to put an end to their personal dilemmas. Quite a few surrendered en masse just in the hope of being allowed to live.

CHAPTER II

BATTLES FOR THE CITIES AND TOWNS

Editor's note

As described in the previous pages, the Viet Cong Tet attacks were a two-pronged offensive campaign with the military prong trying to secure the occupation of as many population centers as possible and the political one seeking the over-throw of the legal administration through a series of uprisings. This pattern was to be found in most Communist efforts against the cities and townships of South Vietnam.

Each attack was to be a little different from the other. In this second chapter we shall describe in a detailed manner how the Communist offensive looked in each and every province of the Republic so that the readers' curiosity may be satisfied and a proper assessment of the Viet Cong campaign may be derived. Such an attempt, in our humble opinion, would not be totally pointless.

In this venture the very first endeavor was to collect data and from these write impartial accounts of what happened. We relied mainly on findings of survey teams sent to various parts of the country and reports of journalists and correspondents who had witnessed what they wrote about.

Beyond military events we have also paid attention to political, economic and social developments that contributed to making South Vietnam what it was during the difficult days of 1968. The words and deeds of quite a few individuals and groups were also mentioned insofar as they were part of a historic process marking life in this embattled nation in the first half of 1968.

This chapter has not been written with the purpose of beautifying the conduct of the Vietnamese soldier or the Vietnamese Army. It simply was the intention of its authors to record all deeds - individual or collective - that contributed so magnificently to keeping South Vietnam a free and independent nation.

This book is not big enough to include all the events and actions of the Viet Cong Winter-Spring Campaign. Major actions, on the whole, are described as fully as possible while small operations are only given sketchy treatment. Described to any extent are only slightly over one half of the 28 attacks against the cities and townships of South Vietnam.

In recounting these actions we have more often than not veered from straight reporting and inserted some personal feelings and impressions. Sometimes we also have included our own or local military commanders' assessments of the situation in their areas of responsibility, to include the shortcomings as well as the assets of the confronting troops. These observations, of course, cannot be completely objective but our ambition is to supply our readers with as unbiased an account of the events of 1968 as possible. We wish to give all concerned, especially students of military affairs, an opportunity to assess the general situation on its own merits and formulate their private opinions.

Although far from being a complete account of what took place in the nation's four corps areas during the Communist Winter-Spring Campaign, it is our feeling that it includes enough data to assess the Viet Cong offensive as a failure. Since the offensive was a catastrophe of major proportions for the aggressors it contained the seeds of many later political and military developments that can only be helpful in achieving a just and lasting peace for the people of South Viet-Nam.

The battle for Saigon

Communist troops attacked Greater Saigon - Saigon, Gia-Định, and Cholon - at exactly 0200 hours of the first day of the Year of the Monkey.

Firecrackers were still exploding in parts of the city at this hour of the night when late revelers began to hear gunfire. For city-dwellers, however,there was little difference between them and it was generally thought that the fun was still on. Some of the Saigonese recognized the gunfire and explosion of grenades but this awareness did not disturb them because they dismissed them as "one of those things in a state of war".

When the sun rose the following morning everything seemed normal throughout the big metropolis. Thousands of people still flocked to the streets, going to places of worship or to the homes of acquaintances. Little by little, however it dawned on the citizens that "something" was in the making although most people still stuck to the belief that it might simply be a coup d'etat such as they had witnessed in the past.

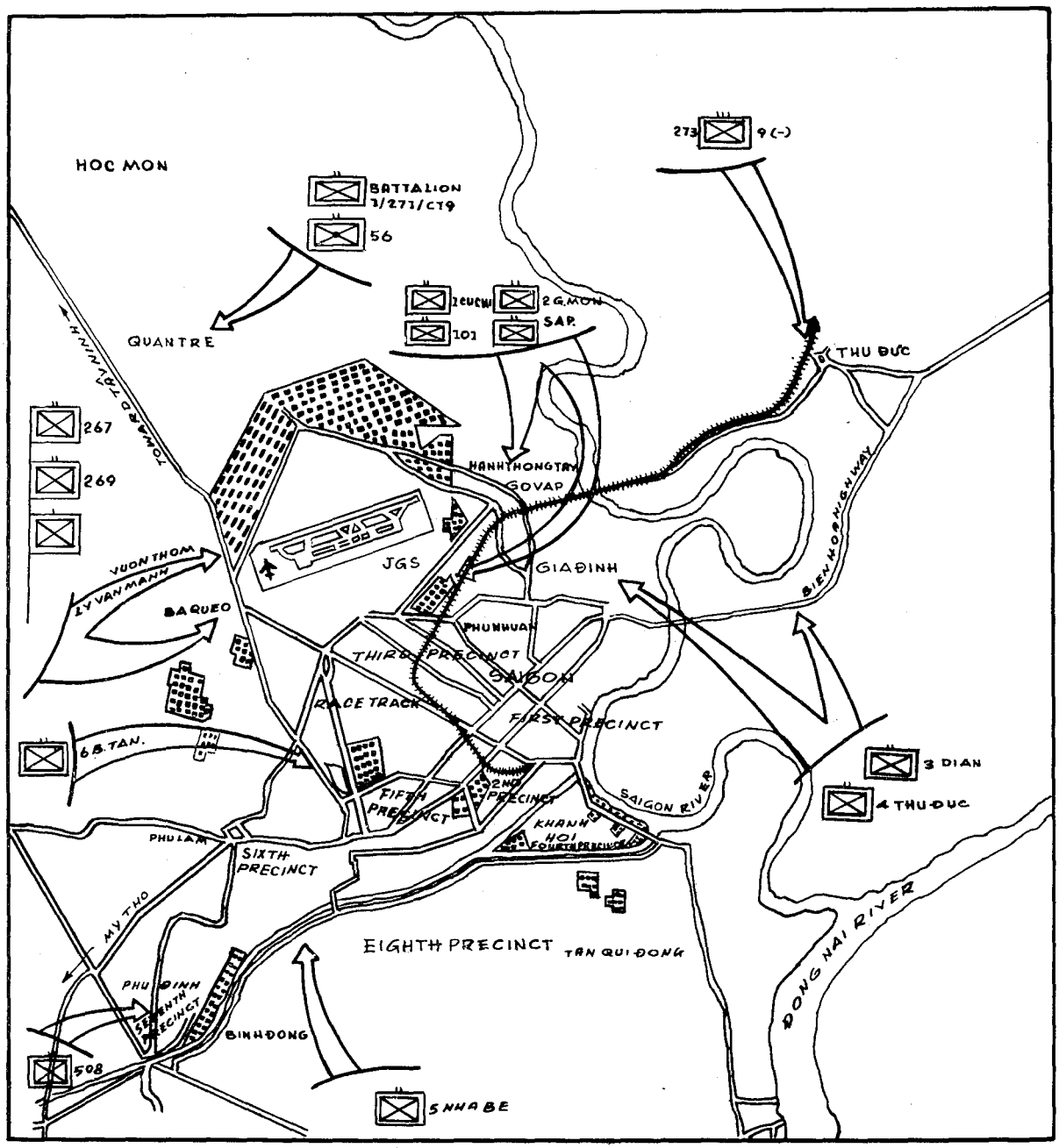
Only at eight o'clock that fateful morning did Radio Saigon broadcast an order proclaiming martial law throughout the land. The order was signed by Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky acting on order from President Nguyen Van Thieu. He denounced the attack as an intolerable violation of the truce understanding.

The people, however, maintained their doubts until it was certain that the Communists had in fact assaulted the capital. The attackers took advantage of the practically uncontrolled movement of goods and men in and out of the metropolis to infiltrate troops and war materiel into the big city.

In the first hours of their offensive the Communists concentrated their efforts on the following key installations. :

'The headquarters of the Vietnamese Armed Forces at Tan Son Nhut, which they penetrated by forcing their way through Gates Four and Five. The intruders were successful in the first few hours but were later blocked when reinforcements arrived.

ENEMY'S PLAN OF ATTACK ON THE CAPITAL DURING TET (1968)



'Independence Palace which the Communists attempted to penetrate through a side entrance on Nguyen Du street. In this attempt, however, Communist sapper troops failed altogether.

'The Vietnamese Navy Headquarters on Bach-Đang Quay. Here all the attackers were killed on reaching the entrance.

'The Tan Son Nhut Airport, which they did not succeed in penetrating. Their assault troops took heavy casualties while trying to approach the western end of the sprawling base near Ba Queo.

'The radio station on Phan Dinh Phung Street, which the Communists penetrated and occupied without being able to use the many studios on the first floor of the building.

'The American Embassy on Thong Nhat Boulevard, where they entered the front yard but were stopped there.

'The chancery of the Embassy of the Philippines, which the Viet Cong occupied easily. There, however, they failed to capture the Ambassador who had time to take refuge elsewhere.

Communist troops also hit a few military installations on the outskirts of the capital on that fateful night, such as the Co Loa and Phu Đong camps which were partially occupied for some time. Some harassment also was recorded against Base 80 and Base 60 in the Hanh Thong Tay area. In their assault on the Quang Trung Training Center in Hoc Mon District, Communist soldiers suffered severe losses before being able to reach the main gate. A few hours after these initial attacks many groups of Communist soldiers could be seen in different parts of the sprawling city.

The enemy situation on the second day of the Year of the Monkey (Jan. 30) could be described as follows :

'In the Northern suburb of Go Vap there was strong enemy pressure on the artillery base of Co Loa, and the Phu Đong camp of the armored branch. The Communist troops also tried their best to penetrate such populous areas as Go Vap and Xom Moi and extend their influence to the Nga Nam Binh Hoa area.

'West of the big city the presence of Communist units was acutely felt in the Ba Queo area as they prepared for an attack on the Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The enemy unit occupied the Vinatexco textile plant and used it as the starting point for their assault on Tan Son Nhut.

'North Northeast of the metropolis the enemy occupied the Hang Xanh area with the intention of attacking the Gia Dinh military district headquarters and making their presence felt on the Bien-Hoa Highway.

'West of Saigon a Viet Cong column penetrated the regions of Phu-Tho and Ba-Hạt.

Two Viet-Cong units, which at the time were in the Thu Đuc and Hoc Mon districts, were active around the Thu Duc district headquarters and the Quang Trung military training camp.

In the downtown section of Saigon V. C. sapper troops assaulted their assigned targets while their comrades from the outlying areas did their best to occupy populated areas, thus forcing Allied garrisons to be spread. They failed in all attempts for the very simple reason that their few troops were deployed against too many targets. Although operating right within our back yards, they could not exploit this tactical advantage. As the sun rose again, enemy troops outside of and within the city could not assemble for a coordinated attack.

The following morning the South Vietnamese high command had the situation well under control, not only in Saigon but throughout the nation as well. During all these troubled hours JGS was constantly in control of military operations throughout the nation. Despite the difficulties of the moment, JGS succeeded in bringing a few small units back to the capital city for its liberation.

In the first hours of the campaign the Communists left the Americans very much alone. Except for an attack on the U. S. Embassy, the many U. S. military and civilian installations throughout the elongated country remained untouched.

At the start of the Tet offensive only two general reserve battalions were in Saigon, the First and Eighth Airborne Battalions. They were preparing to go to the northernmost part of the Republic to help with the battle of Khe Sanh and another battle in the Highlands.

Counterattacks

Following their failure to occupy South Vietnamese military nerve centers in Saigon, the Communists sought survival by mixing with the people. Survivors of these unsuccessful attacks spread out in populated areas and attempted to incite the population to an uprising against the authorities. To prevent this Vietnamese Air Force planes were ordered to remain airborne all day and night to maintain a close watch of enemy movements.

Seeing the airplanes strafing the enemy on the outskirts of the city, thousands of people in threatened areas left their homes and converged on the downtown area. This movement was to prove most helpful to South Vietnamese soldiers who were to be given the task of disloging the intruders from the V.C.-occupied suburbs.

Within a few hours after the beginning of the V. C. offensive, a counterattack was ordered. The Communist campaign was only a few hours old when two companies of the First Airborne Battalion were dispatched to relieve enemy pressure around the radio station. The station was completely free of V. C. presence by early morning.

The government troops were less successful at JGS headquarters. Two companies of the Eighth Airborne Battalion, sent to relieve V. C. pressure near Gate Four, failed to dislodge the enemy from the buildings of the Armed Forces Language School which dominated the area. The two remaining companies, deployed for the protection of the eastern end of the Tan Son Nhut Airport, also failed to prevent Communist troops from infiltrating Ba-Queo and the huge Vinatexco factory just outside the defense perimeter of the all-important air base.

In the meantime the Fifth Ranger Group, consisting of four battalions (30, 33, 34 and 38) normally assigned to the defense of a quadrangle made up of Thu Duc, Nha Be, Binh Chanh, and Hoc Mon, had during the night dispatched two of its battalions to the capital city. Prior to daylight, on the second day of Tet, the 30th and 38th Battalions had reached the suburbs. At four o'clock in the morning the 30th Battalion arrived in the area of Hang Xanh where it immediately engaged the enemy. The 38th, starting from Nha Be, also arrived in the area of the race track at about the same time.

Two hours later the Fourth Marine Battalion was helilifted from Vung Tau to Saigon although it had been continously engaged in operations in the northern provinces a bare 48 hours before. The Marine Task Force, which consisted of the First and Second Battalions and was garrisoning in the area of Cai Lay, Đinh Tuong province, also was brought to Saigon early that evening.

Before the arrival of these troops the intruders had moved from the outskirts to the vicinity of Nguyen Kim Boulevard, which is near the Cong Hoa Stadium. They had not met with strong resistance up to this point. They had only fired a few shots at a police station south of the race track, a field police camp on Tran Quoc Toan Boulevard, and a few other installations in that general area.

The Communist column succeeded in occupying the race track and residential areas around the Women Auxiliary Corps School. From this point they deployed to a big quadrangle made up by the Nguyen Tri Phuong, Tran Quoc Toan, Ly Thai To and Minh Phung Boulevards and extending from the Tu Nghiem Pagoda to the seat of militant Buddhism at An Quang Pagoda. A few hours later the Nguyen Kim Boulevard came under aerial attack following the reported presence of "a great many Viet Cong".

That afternoon enemy troops penetrated the Nhi Đong Hospital, harassed the base camp of the Fifth MP Battalion on Ly Thai To Boulevard and from there reached Su Van Hanh Street and the An Quang Pagoda, occupying part of it. Their presence in this populous section of the city indicated their intention of staging a popular uprising which, if successful, would be directed to other parts of the city.

During all this time the people of Saigon only had the local radio and their ears to help in keeping themselves informed of what was happening in their city. Since most newspaper offices were still closed for the long holiday, Radio Saigon was the only source of information. Unlike previous troubled days in the capital, the national radio not only broadcasted martial music but it also gave short news bulletins every now and then.

The radio station soon announced that the tempo of fighting in the Hang Xanh area had been reduced a little, following some minor successes of the government troops. Through the radio the people of Saigon also were notified that the area of Ba Queo, especially around the Vinatexco textile plant, must be evacuated by 0600

hours since the Saigon Command of the insurgents was known to be in that area. Following repeated unanswered calls for the Viet-Cong elements to surrender, the Vinatexco area was leveled, thus preventing the Communists from gathering enough troops for a night attack on the all important Tan Son Nhut air base.

Earlier in the evening,helicopter gunships were used to hit the area surrounding the WAC School. Infantry were dispatched to regain control of a section of the Nguyen Van Thoai Boulevard. This boulevard bordered the race track which was already under Communist occupation.

By early morning of the third day of the Year of the Monkey (Feb. 1) eight battalions of the General Reserve had been brought back to Saigon. They were deployed as follows :

' The Sixth and Eighth Airborne Battalions : Their mission was to relieve enemy pressure on the Eastern Gate of the Tran Hung Đao Camp.

' The First Airborne Battalion : Its mission was to guard the radio station while serving as combat reserve in Saigon.

' The Second Marine Battalion : Its role was to defend highway - railway junctions Number Two and Four in Gia Đinh.

' The First Marine Battalion : Its task was to cut all routes for withdrawal of Communist elements attacking the Co Loa Camp.

' The 30th Ranger Battalion : Its role was to liberate the Hang Xanh area.

' The 38th Ranger Battalion : Its role was to liberate the Phu Tho and Ba Hat sections of the city.

On Feb. 1 the headquarters of the Vietnamese Armed Forces was completely cleared of Communist intruders. Prior to the liberation of this area, however, helicopter gunships had to be used, resulting in considerable damage to the Armed Forces Language School, the AG School, and some of the minor military installations in the vicinity of Gate Four. South Vietnamese Marines had reoccupied the Co Loa and Phu Đong camps where the enemy had penetrated and dug in at the start of their Tet Campaign.

In Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon, the situation had grown more serious with more and more Viet Cong units reported

in the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Precincts. To meet this threat the Second Marine Battalion, which had been ordered to Cholon, immediately launched an operation against the area of the An Quang Pagoda. The 33d Ranger Battalion also was sent to a new front opening in Binh-An in the Seventh Precinct.

The Sixth Marine Battalion, which had been in Bong Son on the Central Coast, was airlifted to Saigon where it arrived on 2 February. After resting the night in Saigon, these elite troops were immediately dispatched to the sub-sector of Thu Duc.

What was the enemy's strength in Saigon ?

To stage this unprecedented attack, the Communist High Command had deployed a total of approximately 17 battalions, both Main Force and regional troops including a battalion-size group of sappers. Included in this total were only those forces directly participating in the Battle for Saigon. Not included were major units such as the Seventh and Ninth Divisions that were kept as reserves in the vicinity of the capital.

The Communist attacking force at the height of the V. C. attack included the following :

' One battalion of Regiment 271/CT. 9 reinforced by Battalion 56/U. 80 with the mission of attacking the Quang-Trung Camp and neighboring areas.

' Battalions 267 and 269, reinforced by elements of Regiment 271, with the mission of assaulting the Tan Son Nhut Airport.

' Two battalions of Regiment 273/CT. 9 with the mission of attacking the Thu Duc Sub-Sector.

' Battalion Cu Chi One, reinforced by a battalion of Regiment 101/CT. 7 and elements of the Second Mechanized Battalion of the "R" Command, attacking and occupying the many depots at Go Vap.

' Battalion Go Mon Two, in conjunction with Sapper Group J. 1/F. 100, was to attack the JGS general headquarters through Gate Four.

' Battalion Di An Three or 3/165 A was in charge of Hang Xanh area.

' Battalion 4 Thu-Duc or 4/165A had the role of cutting the Bien-Hoa Highway.

' Battalion Binh-Tan Six or 6/165A was in charge of the area of Phu-Tho and Ba-Hat.

' Battalion Long-An 508 was to control the area of Binh-Tay.

' Special Group F. 100 had the mission of attacking the radio station, Gate Five of Tran Hung Đao Camp, the Navy headquarters, the U.S. Embassy, and the Philippine Embassy.

To meet this threat the South Vietnamese Army brought as many troops as possible to Saigon. As of 4 February total ARVN strength in Saigon had reached ten battalions, not including the thousands of policemen in the capital.

Operation Tran Hưng Đao

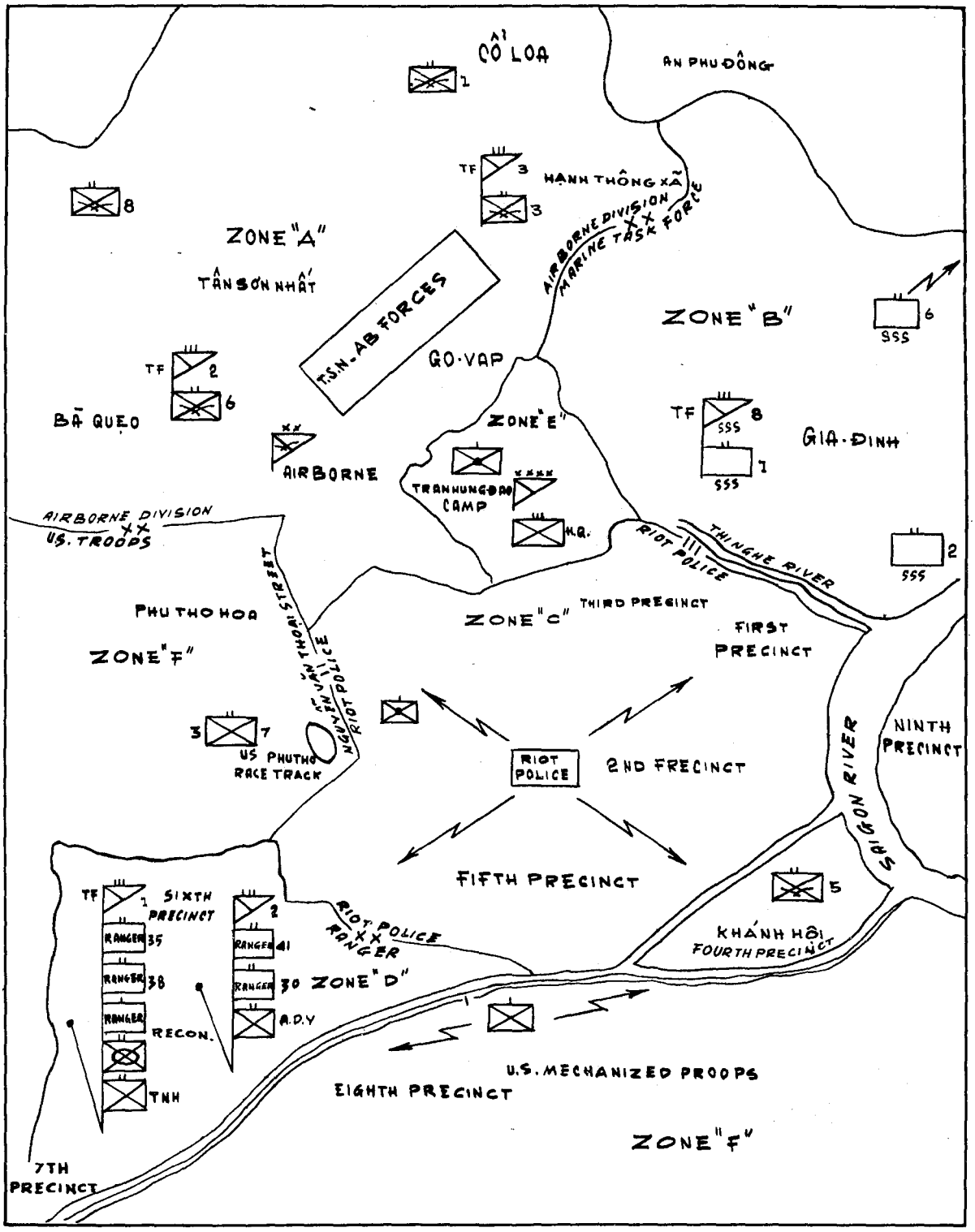
On 5 February 1968 an operation code named "Operation Tran-Hưng-Đao" was launched under the direct command of General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff. Its purpose was to speedily eliminate the Communist threat in Saigon. Major General Tran Thanh Phong, Chief of Staff, was to serve as Chief of Staff and Brigadier General Cao Hao Hon as Vice Chief of Staff of the operating forces.

Operation Tran Hung Đao named after the nation's greatest hero - three times victor over the Mongolian hordes seven centuries ago - was to take place in Saigon and the neighboring areas. Saigon, originally consisting of five tactical areas of responsibility was given a sixth such area which was entrusted to U.S. troops. The five subdivisions under South Vietnamese responsibility were as follows :

Zone "A" under the reponsibility of Major General Du Quoc Dong, commander of the Airborne Division. Zone "B" with Colonel Nguyen Thanh Yen, deputy commander of the Marine Corps. Zone "C" with Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Director General of the National Police. Zone "D" with Colonel Tran Van Hai, commander of the Ranger troops. Zone "E" with Brigadier General Ngo Dzu. And Zone "F" was entrusted to the U.S. High Command (See chart).

Zone A. Zone "A" was made the responsibility of the

FRIENDLY DISPOSITION DURING TRAN HUNG DAO CAMPAIGN
IN THE CAPITAL



Airborne Division which employed two task forces. Task Force Two, including the Sixth and Eighth Battalions had within its tactical area of responsibility the regions of Ba Queo, Phu Tho Hoa, Ba Diem and Tan Phu. Task Force Three, including the First and Third Battalions, had the suburbs of Co Loa, Xom Moi and Go Vap. The commander of Zone "A" also had at his disposal an artillery battalion and a group of armored cars.

Zone B. Zone "B" was the responsibility of the South Vietnamese Marine Corps and came under the operational control of the Marine Task Force B reinforced by an artillery battalion and an armored group. Zone "B" included the areas of Gia Dinh, Thu Duc and the Bien Hoa Highways.

Zone C. Zone "C", which included some of the relatively most secure parts of the Capital, was the responsibility of the Police. It included the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Precincts. Saigon Police elements, reinforced by field police, had the mission of mounting police operations to seperate Communist elements from the population.

Zone D. Zone "D" was the responsibility of the Ranger command and was under the operational control of the Fifth Ranger Group. This group included four battalions:The 33th in Binh Thoi and Cau Tre, the 38th in Minh Phung, the 41st in Phu-Dinh and the 30th in Binh Dong. The Rangers had within their TAOR the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Precincts. They also were reinforced by the Fifth Armored Group and a river patrol group as well as a reconnaissance company. The river patrol group operated on the Kinh Doi Canal.

Zone E. Zone "E", including the sprawling Tran Hung Dao Camp and some of the neighboring populated areas, was the responsibility of the local garrisons. The troops, in addition to their staff responsibilities, were organized into companies and battalions for the defense of this most important installation. They had the assistance of the Battalion of Honor Guards, an MP Company, an M.41 Tank Group, an armored group and a group of reconnaissance cars.

The organization of these forces was based on the following criteria: each company was to include 118 men and four such companies were to comprise a battalion which also was to have a headquarter group of ten men. Four such battalions made up a group which then would include 1928 men. On this basis most people serving at headquarters had to directly take part in the defence of their installation with the

possible exception of very few high-ranking officers and some of the indispensable staff elements. It was not rare to see majors serving as squad leaders and lieutenants serving as ordinary foot soldiers.

On 7 February 1968 the group was presented to General Vien and then immediately went on operation. It was called the Tran Hung Đao Group. Its four battalions were known as the Ly Thuong Kiet, Le Loi, Nguyen Hue and Le Van Duyet battalions.

Except for Zone "C" and "E" police elements in all other areas were put under operational control of the local military commands.

Zone F. Zone "F", assigned to the American troops, included as of 9 February the area south of the Kinh Đoi Canal and west of Phu Tho Hoa. Outside this zone the American High Command had organized a security belt with the 1/27 Battalion operating in Hoc Mon district ; 2/27 Battalion and Company A of the 1/4 Armored Battalion in the area of Binh Loc ; 3/27 Battalion in conjunction with the J. 60 Mechanized Company and an APC group in the area southwest and west of the Seventh Precinct ; 2/237 Battalion in Nha Be district ; and a task force consisting of 1/18 Battalion and some tanks in Thu Đuc and the Giong Ong To area.

Offensive résumé

With opposing forces deployed as presented in the preceding pages, what did the friendly forces and the Communists do during the critical days of the month of February ?

1. The Western Front. Two Viet Cong battalions (267th and 269th) reinforced by elements of the First Battalion, Regiment 271, CT. 9 Division, appeared in the area of Ba Queo at the very beginning of the fighting, coming from outlying suburbs to the west of the capital. An initial strike force of about 100 men was soon followed by the 267th and 269th Battalion . This task force was put under the command of a headquarter group that quartered at the Vinatexco textile company in preparation for the advance on the Tan Son Nhut Airport.

At Approximately 0345 hours the First Company of Battalion 269 volunteered for an attack on both towers OF. 51-51 and OF. 49-50. They met with strong resistance from the garrisons. Unable to penetrate the air base through that gate,they cut a route through the mine field with the intention of destroying the two towers at any

costs. They knocked down one of the towers with their B. 40 individual rocket launchers, killing seven of the defenders and wounding the remaining five. Isolated, the troops in the other outpost withdrew from the advancing enemy.

At 0520 hours the intruders advanced toward the end of the airstrip where they could see dozens of airplanes of all types parked a bare 600 yards away. At that very moment two M. 8 tanks appeared followed by a composite collection of vehicles bringing a still more varied collection of soldiers. This group included staff officers of the 33rd Air Wing and paratroopers from two reinforcement companies which were dispatched that morning for the protection of Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky.

The very first friendly rounds hit the Communists when they were 400 yards from the airstrip. The intruders hastily tried to seek cover but found none in this open field. At that moment the two tanks immediately made a pincer movement, leaving the frontal attack to the combined Air Force-Airborne combined group. The Communists, unable to resist the mounting pressure, withdrew to the towers they had just destroyed, A single friendly assault wave resulted in the capture of one of the OF's.

It was soon learned that all 162 intruders were killed. They are now buried in a mass grave Air Force bulldozers had to dig for them at the southern end of the Tan Son Nhut airstrip.

Lieutenant Colonel Luu Kim Cuong, commander of the 33rd Wing, took personal control of this counterattack. Although Cuong was wounded in the leg at the very beginning of the operation, he was continuously present at the side of his comrades-in-arms. Besides Colonel Cuong many other airmen distinguished themselves, especially Lieutenant Tran Ngoc Chan and some 11 servicemen who spearheaded the reoccupation of the two OF's. Major Phung Van Chieu, who was wounded near the eyes, and Lieutenant Tran Van Loc, who was hit three times while using the machinegun on top of a tank, also were among the heroes of the day.

Had the 33rd Air Wing command reacted some ten minutes later than they did, the Communists might have invaded the parking lot and its nerve center.

About a quarter of an hour earlier two companies of the Eighth Airborne Battalion had been dispatched to the Vinatexco factory

where minutes later they clashed with the Communists. With the support of gunships and fighter-bombers they kept the situation under control. At about this same time a U. S. armored column, passing through this area, was attacked by the V. C. who succeeded in destroying two vehicles. Quick reaction by the Americans not only resulted in keeping the road open but also forced the Communists out of OF. 51-51 and caused them to retreat in the direction of the Vinatexco factory.

Following their defeat at the southwestern end of the air strip,the enemy returned to the Vinatexco factory to prepare for the next round. They did not have time to do anything. The paratroopers, in conjunction with the Air Force,pushed their attack on the textile factory and practically annihilated all members of the V. C. 267th Battalion. Normalcy was restored in the area.

2. The Northeastern Front V. C. troops came to the suburb of Hang Xanh after going through such areas as Vuon Trau and Giong Ong To in the district of Thu Duc. The enemy had concentrated Battalion Di An Three in this area since the first day of the Year of the Monkey. They prevented the population from leaving the area many hours before the attack actually began,in order to maintain secrecy.

Around 0200 hours on the second day of the Year of the Monkey the enemy attacked the Hang Xanh Police Station with big guns, immediately destroying the protecting wall of the station. The attack was followed by a ground assault in the course of which the attackers killed some of the policemen standing guard. They ransacked the place, throwing papers and documents all around.

In the meantime the 30th Ranger Battalion had received the order to move from its base camp in Thu Duc toward the capital city. It arrived at the Hang Xanh area in the early hours of 31 January but was not aware of the presence of the Communists at the gates of Saigon. The Ranger column was moving at a hair-raising speed when it came under fire from Viet Cong troops lurking on both sides of the road and firing from two storied houses near the police station.

The lead vehicle was hit by a B. 40 rocket and immediately caught fire. Although two Rangers were killed and another two wounded,the crack troops reacted speedily advancing in the direction of the enemy machinegun positions. Under the command of Captain Phan Van Sanh they used their ammunition sparingly since the civilian population had not been able to leave the area.

Viet Cong troops left the Nguyen Duy Khang High School,



The remnants of the lead Ranger vehicle which was destroyed in the early hours of 31 January 1968 by B.40 rocket fire.



Many civilians in Hang Xanh and Cau Son suddenly became refugees in their own town.



30th Battalion Rangers preparing for an attack on the Hang Xanh Police Station and nearby houses.

possibly because of the relatively low exchange of fire. Shots and explosions could be heard intermittently until dawn. By then Captain Sanh had ordered his troops into three columns ready to move against the enemy. Sanh also had ordered his soldier to tell the civilian population to evacuate the area prior to counterattacking at ten o'clock.

Some of the people living in this region had left for more secure zones by eight o'clock. Yet quite a large number of civilians, especially in the Cau Son area, could not get out. A Brown Beret column, starting from Newport a little before noon, moved cautiously through populated areas of Thi Nghe with the intention of hitting the enemy from behind. The fighting became intense from the very first minute.

At approximately the same time another Ranger column, starting from the Buddhist pagoda bordering on the Bien Hoa Highway assaulted the Communist force entrenched in the police station and some houses nearby. Only individual weapons were used in order to minimize civilian casualties. Both government soldiers and Communist troops closely watched one another. At nightfall this mutual observation was facilitated by the glare of flares hanging in the sky.

The following day government soldiers again told the civilian population to evacuate the area prior to calling in air strikes against known V. C. positions. The civilian population departed from the area before the planes arrived and strafed Communist positions. The opposing troops remained face to face for their inevitable confrontation. Early in the afternoon a column of M. 41 tanks and M. 113 armored cars arrived, opening the way for the advancing government foot soldiers.

Captain Sanh was leading his battalion while moving in the direction of Cau Son bridge. The armored column had barely covered 200 yards when a deafening explosion was heard which set the leading car afire and killed two soldiers while wounding two others. The Ranger commander escaped unscathed. Having observed the origin of the warhead, Captain Sanh directed fire on the B. 40 position. An hour later his troops found three Viet Cong dead beside a B. 40 rocket launcher and an M. 79 grenade launcher.

The column of advancing troops soon had to stop its thrust. An immense fire was devastating the area from Hang-Xanh to the breeding farm which was administered by Lasan Brothers in Thi Nghe. Viet Cong elements, taking advantage of the conflagration, withdrew to outlying areas.



View of Hang Xanh street after 60 hours of fighting.



Hang Xanh after the battle

The battle of Hang Xanh had come to an end. In the course of 60 hours of uninterrupted fighting the enemy had lost 85 killed, three prisoners, and a significant number of weapons. The loss included 22 individual weapons, 5 B. 40 individual rocket launchers and another five crew-served weapons. On the friendly side twelve Rangers were killed along with two members of the armored column; another 25 were wounded and one M. 113 armored car was destroyed.

Most remarkable of all was the small number of civilians killed during the long battle. Although Hang Xanh had an estimated 10,000 inhabitants, only two were killed by stray bullets although some 5,000 were to become homeless refugees.

3. The Phu Tho Battle. In the Western suburb of Phu Tho the enemy strength consisted mainly of Battalion Binh-Tan Six, which had penetrated the city without encountering too many difficulties. By 0330 hours the intruders had full control of the race track and the neighboring area. From this vicinity they mounted an attack on the field police station but were repulsed, thanks to the strong fortifications within the police compound.

The Thirty-Eighth Ranger Battalion, which had been assigned the mission of restoring order in this region, had arrived on the scene in the early hours of 31 January. Under the command of Captain Dinh Trong Cuong the crack troops debarked on Tran Quoc Toan Boulevard and from there moved in the direction of the Nguyen Tri Phuong Market. At the corner of Petrus Ky and Tran Quoc Toan Boulevards Captain Cuong ordered his troops to spread out and then they attacked the Communists frontally and from behind.

The infiltrators, however, were not going to let government troops overrun them easily. They had organized themselves in two or three-storied buildings, especially those bordering on small alleys. They were strongest along Nguyen Tieu La and Nguyen Tri Phuong Boulevards. When government troops appeared in that general area, a hail of bullets greeted the Rangers, starting one of the most savage battles in Saigon.

When the frontal assault troops failed to end Communist resistance, the second Ranger column hit the enemy from behind. This very first encounter in the Phu Tho area caused the Communists to hastily withdrew in the direction of Trieu Da, Nguyen Kim, Nguyen Lam and Nguyen Van Thoai Streets.



One of the many fires burning in Cholon on 2 February 1968



Civilians leaving VC threatened areas.

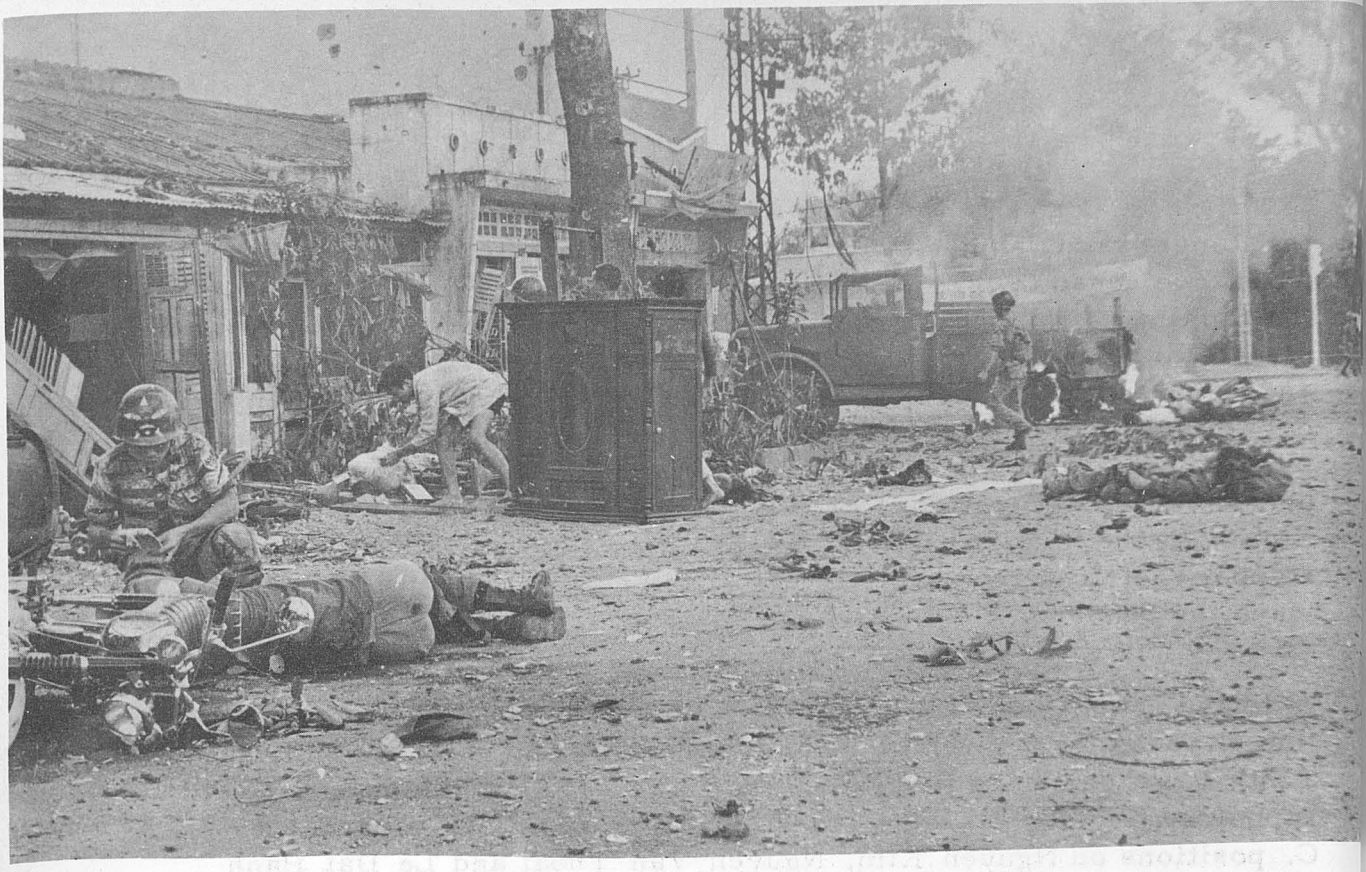
Prior to the Ranger encirclement movement, however, the Ranger commander had ordered one of his companies and a reconnaissance squad to take advantage of the enemy's preoccupation with the fighting on Nguyen Tri Phương, Nguyen Tieu La and Trieu Đa Streets to penetrate the area delineated by Nguyen Kim, Nguyen Lam and Nguyen van Thoai Boulevards. This created what Vo Nguyen Giap called a situation of intermingled presence with troops of both sides intertwined in a most confused line of battle. The enemy was also present at Lu Gia quarters, Nguyen Van Thoại and Thiec Market. Following the initial defeat of the Viet Cong, both sides temporarily stopped their firing, thus giving the civilian population a chance to leave the battle zone.

A three pronged attack was launched after the population had been evacuated, which was around 1000 hours. The Ranger battalion attacked from three sides and elements of an engineer unit, the Tenth Transportation Battalion, and some field policemen effectively supported the attack. Some Brown Berets made close contact with V. C. positions on Nguyen Kim, Nguyen Van Thoai and Le Đai Hanh Streets.

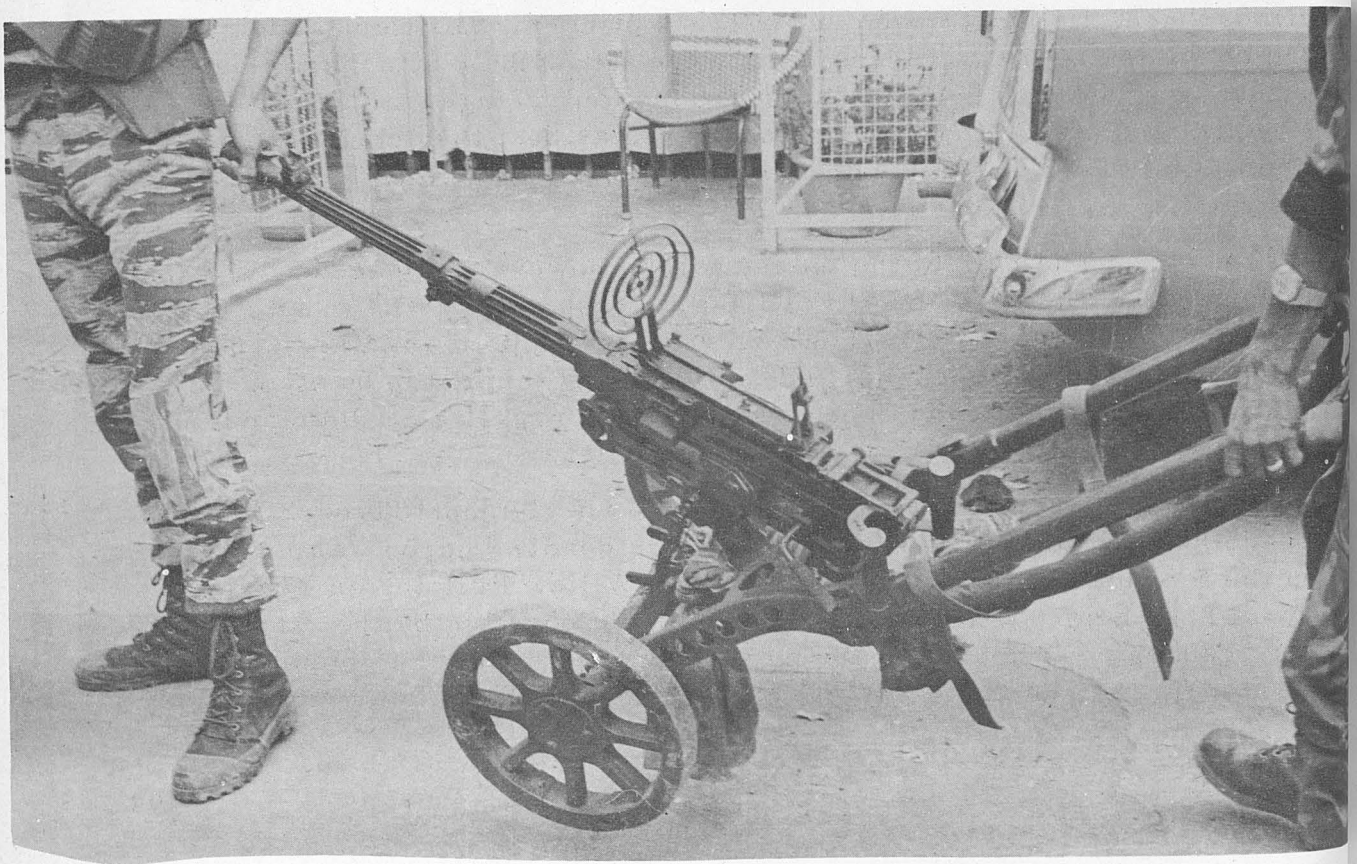
Within minutes the Nguyen Tri Phuong area disappeared in a screen of smoke and fire with explosions of all sorts shaking the atmosphere. Helicopter gunships struck at enemy positions, adding to the confusion of the intruders, who were left with no alternative but to withdraw. Some of the Communist troops took refuge in the Children's Hospital and other small groups scattered as best they could. Some of them, like the three Viet-Cong who mistook the Dao Duy Tu Camp for a school, were immediately killed.

The bulk of the enemy force, however, succeeded in retreating in the direction of the Le Đai Hanh and Lu-Gia quarter adjacent to the race track. The government troops maintained continuing contact with the enemy and, in following them step by step, destroyed one machinegun position near the Cong-Hoa Stadium and captured another on Nguyen Van Thoai Boulevard.

The attacking troops found a wheel-mounted machinegun in another portion of the battle area. This deadly weapon was located on the top floor of the six-storied Golden Willow Building on Tran Quoc Toan Boulevard. Its capture was made possible by the extraordinary courage of Rangers of the First Company under the command of Lieutenant Nguyen-Ngoc-An. Two of the four officers and men who



Tran Quoc Toan boulevard after the battle



This heavy machinegun was captured atop the Golden Willow building in Cholon.

actually entered the building and seized the weapon were killed. The two survivors were identified as First Lieutenant Pham and Private First Class Minh. As soon as Lt. Pham had learned of the presence of the heavy machinegun atop the tall building and had received the order to seize it, he and his handful of men tried to penetrate the massive building by climbing up waterspouts in order to catch the enemy by surprise. Pham and his men killed the Communists in a rapid exchange of gunfire. Losing the machinegun, enemy troops withdrew from the area.

Subsequent developments in this general area proved that Lt. An was correct in ordering the capture of the machinegun at any cost. At the time the Communists began infiltrating this part of the city, they had assumed that government reinforcement would be brought to the race track by helicopters. Their tremendous efforts to bring the heavy weapon to the top floor of the Golden Willow Building was understandable in the light of their intention to use it against the troop-carrying choppers when these should arrive.

As predicted, barely two hours after the heavy machinegun was seized, a sizeable reinforcement group was dispatched to the nearby race track aboard huge Chinook helicopters. The choppers followed one another to this potentially most vulnerable target area. Military commanders later refused to speculate what might have happen if the ideally located heavy machinegun had not been captured by Lt. An and his men.

The Phu-Tho Battle lasted nearly two days resulting in 98 Communists dead and two prisoners. Government troops also captured one heavy machinegun, four B. 40 individual rocket launchers and four other crew-served weapons as well as destroying another two machineguns.

After normalcy was restored in this area, the Ranger battalion dispatched one of its companies to reinforce government troops on the Hang Xanh front line. This was done because during the night of the third day of the Year of the Monkey Communist infiltrators again appeared in the area of Binh Hoa after being dislodged from Go Vap. In the area of Hang-Xanh itself the 30th Ranger Battalion was involved in a series of small actions against a group of stray Viet Cong infiltrators. Overall the battalion was more involved with relief work than with combat, following its victories two days earlier.

4. The Go Vap Front. The Go Vap front was continuously active from the beginning of the Tet offensive. Enemy strength in this area consisted of Battalion Cu Chi One and another battalion from the 101st Regiment. This initial force was strengthened with elements of the Second Mechanized Battalion of the "R" Command. This column had penetrated Saigon after joining with another column consisting of Battalion Go Mon Two and a sapper unit called J. 1/100.

Arriving near its destination, this force again divided itself into two. The first column went through the village of An Nhon for an attack on the logistics area of Go Vap. The second column followed the railroad track for an attack on the Joint General Staff through Gate Number Four on the northeastern side of the sprawling headquarter compound.

The first column attacked Go Vap in the early hours of 31 January. They occupied Phu Đong and Co Loa Camps, respectively, the Headquarters of the Armored Branch and the Artillery Branch, having driven off some of the garrisoning troops and killed the rest. The Communist also attacked Base 80 of the Ordnance Branch and Base 60 of the Communications Branch. The latter assaults, however, did not succeed.

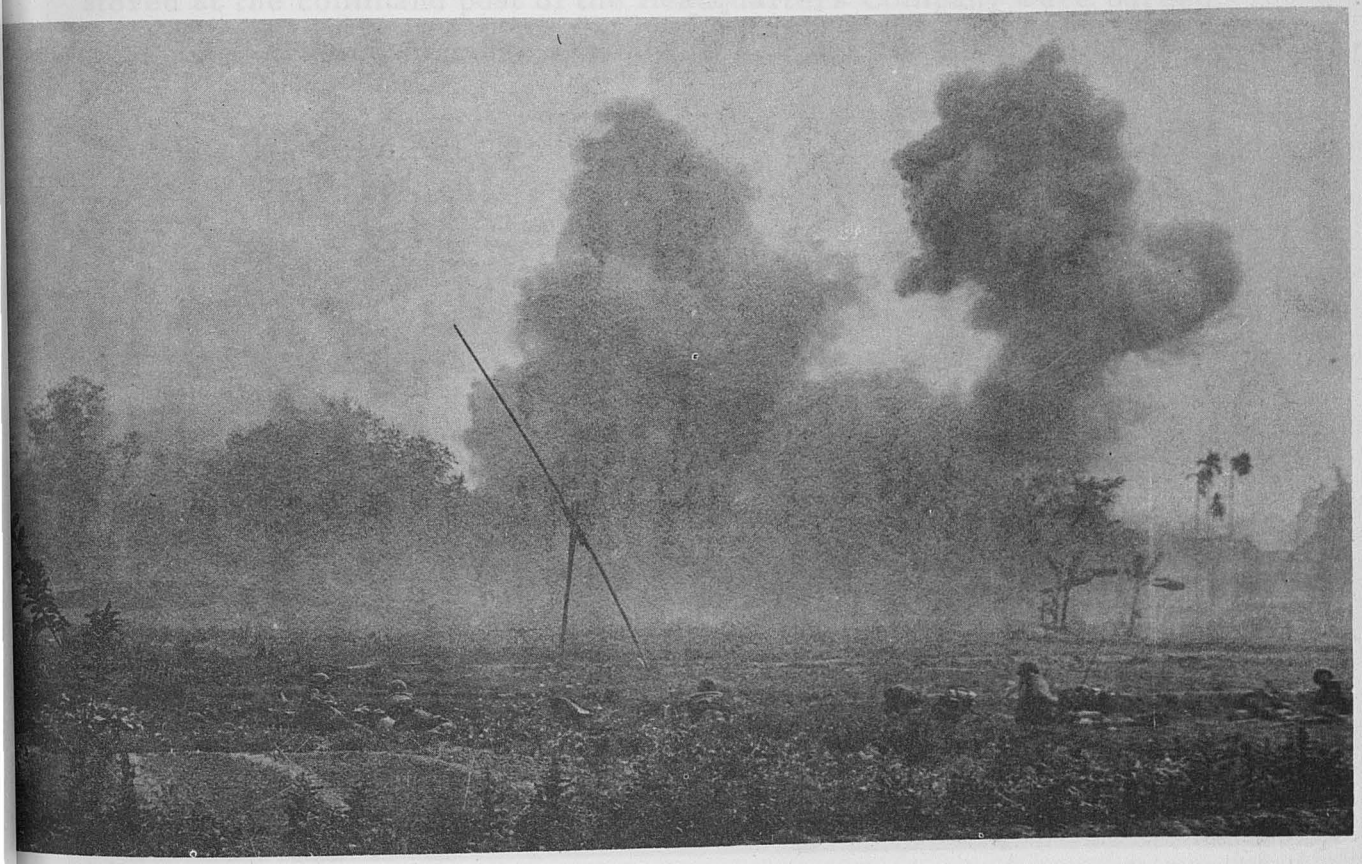
The enemy assault on Base Camp 80 was repulsed mainly with grenades and well directed fire from three heavy machineguns located atop the camp. Major Đoan Du Khuong, who commanded the camp at the time, was directing the counterfire when he was hit in the face and instantly killed.

The second Communist column commenced their attack on Gate Number Four much later. Starting their assault by about 0700 hours, they succeeded in penetrating the area but were immediately pinned down in the buildings of the Armed Forces Languages School. Two hours later airborne troops, arriving as reinforcements, conducted a counterattack with a few M. 41 tanks leading the attack.

Communist resistance in this area was fierce. Taking advantage of extensive fortifications and multistoried buildings on Vo Di Nguy boulevard, V. C. troops kept the crack paratroopers at a distance. One of the tanks was destroyed and a number of government soldiers were wounded in a day-long seesaw battle that saw no winner or loser in this first day of fighting.



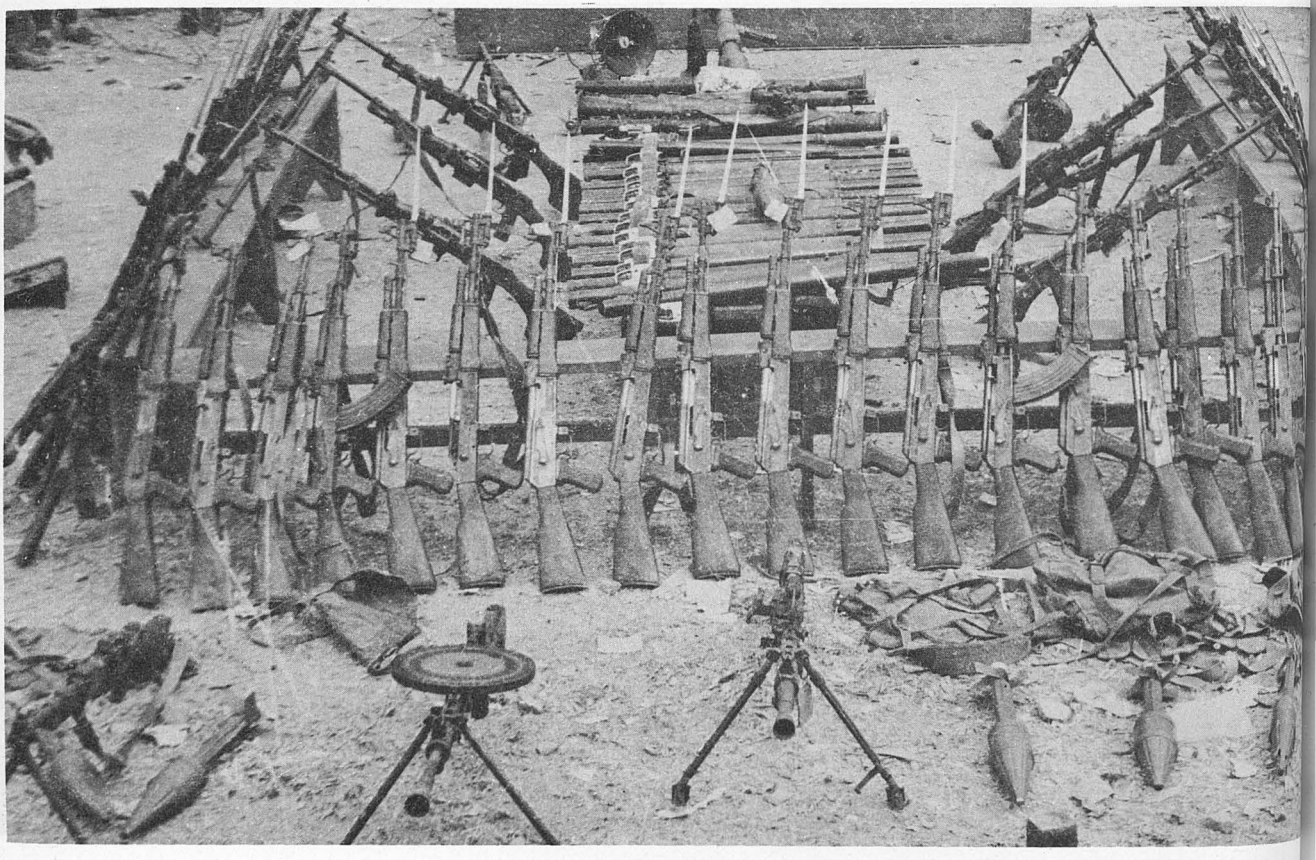
Airborne troops assaulting Xom Moi as recorded by an army photographer 6 February 1968.



Defensive positions of the 3rd Airborne group at the Co Loa Camp (in Go Vap) 6 Feb. 1968.



An Nhon after the battle of 6 February 1968



Some of the weapons captured by government troops
Northeast of Co Loa Camp on 7 February 1968

The following day, 1 February, the Second Marine Battalion was dispatched to Gate Four to help with the task of clearing this all important area. The commander of the Airborne Division requested that his troops be given the honor of dislodging the intruders. The request was granted. The Sixth Airborne Battalion was brought to the scene and in conjunction with the units already engaged counterattacked the enemy.

A few minutes before the counterattack began, helicopter gunships had been brought in for intense strafing of the installations occupied by the Headquarters Company and the AG School. Following the strafing, airborne troops advanced toward the enemy from Gates Three and Two in a pincer movement that grew tighter with each passing second. Outnumbered and outgunned, the insurgents broke off in the direction of Vo Di Nguy boulevard.

The clearing operation was pronounced terminated by 1000 hours. The enemy had left behind a dozen bodies. According to military dependents, stuck in the battle zone during the fighting, he did have time to evacuate many of his dead and wounded. His firepower during this battle was great for the simple reason that he took advantage of ready fortifications and some of the weapons left behind by our troops in their hasty retreat during the first hours of the offensive. Some of the weapons stored at the command post of the Headquarters Company were burned.

The Communist troops retreating from the Headquarters were immediately chased by South Vietnamese marines from the Second Marine Battalion. The Marines had come to Vo Di Nguy Boulevard and dislodged minor V. C. forces from the railroad track leading to the Chuong Cho Intersection. The Blood Bank was also speedily liberated by government soldiers.

Early in the afternoon the First Marine Battalion was helilifted to Go Vap to prevent the enemy from withdrawing in a southward direction. Hours later another battalion, the Fourth Marine, also was brought to the same area. It was only a matter of hours before the Communists were driven out of the Co Loa and Phu Dong Camps. In fact, by 1830 hours that day, these two important installations were pronounced liberated.

Remnants of the Viet Cong force realized they were being surrounded. In a desperate effort to get away from this enormous trap, they mounted a three pronged attack on positions of the First Marine. This effort only resulted in greater casualties on the part of the assailants.

The Binh Hoa Front. By 2 February, with the Go Vap area back to normal, fighting spilled over into the Binh Hoa Intersection in Gia Dinh City. This section was a very populated area with a complicated road system. When the 38th Ranger Battalion arrived at the intersection of Nguyen Van Hoc and Truong Cong Dinh Streets, at 0800 hours, its forward elements received heavy fire from V. C. troops positioned along both streets.

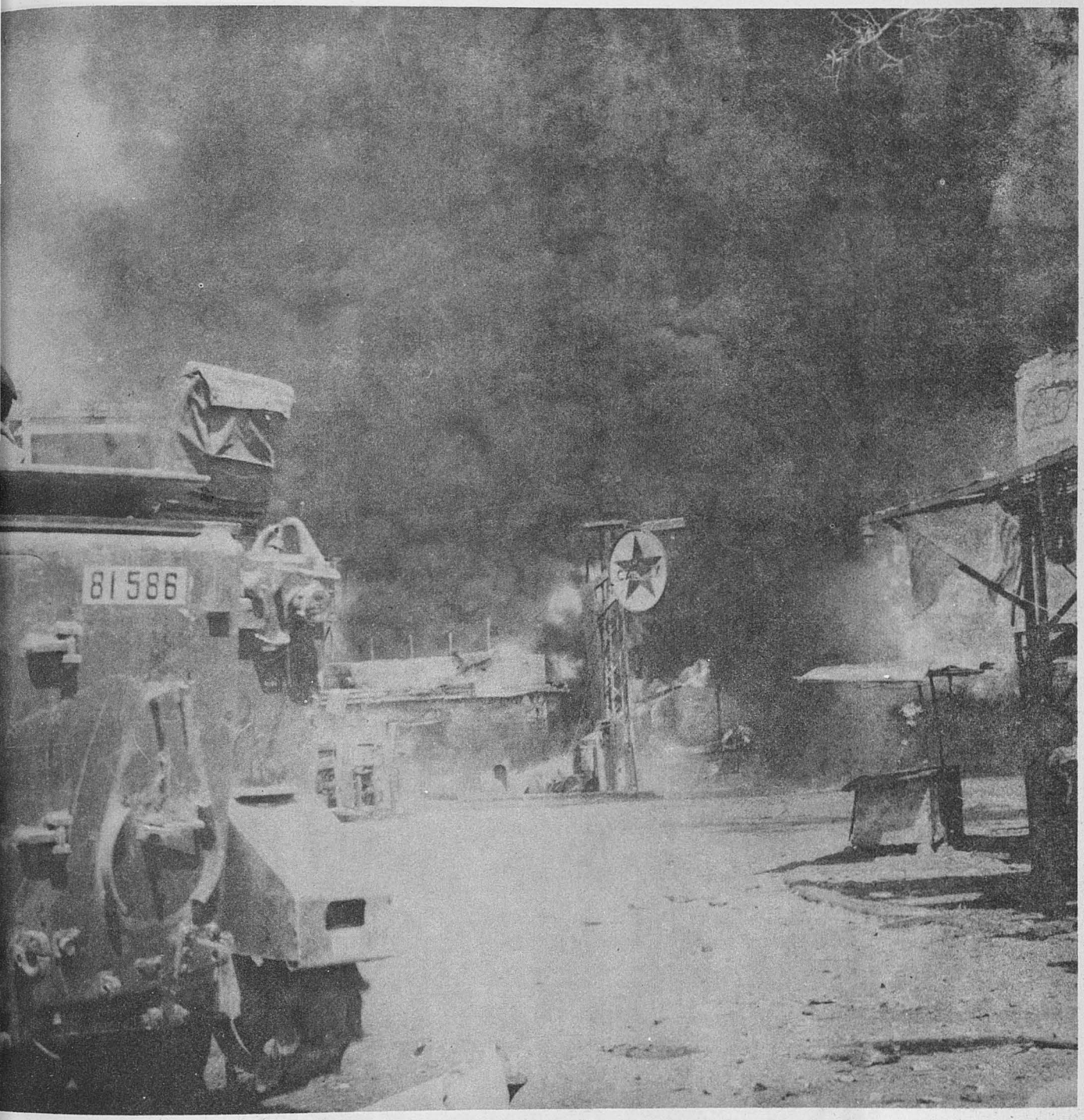
Although supported by a column of M. 113 armored personnel carriers, friendly troops restrained their response since overreaction might have brought about many unnecessary civilian casualties. A B. 40 rocket had exploded in the path of the advancing column in the very first minutes of this battle. Although it did no damage, it killed a Green Beret and wounded two others. For these reasons the Ranger commander stopped the column and called upon the population to evacuate the battle area. The insurgents, as they had done on previous occasions, did their best to prevent the civilians from complying.

During the relative lull that ensued, the Communists withdrew to the many blind alleys and side streets with the hope of hitting the government column from behind. It was about ten o'clock when the enemy movement started and it was immediately reported to the Rangers. They at once blocked the enemy route. Unable to do what they had set out to do, the Communists took refuge in a pagoda and a cemetery on Phan Van Tri Street. They also occupied a multi-storied building at the Binh Hoa Intersection.

The Rangers once more had to call on the population to leave the battle zone, telling them that government forces would attack the Viet Cong force within half an hour. As soon as the Green Berets resumed their advance, the Communist directed a hail of bullets at them. Helicopter gunships had been called and their deadly fire soon made the situation untenable for the intruders.

Within minutes after the arrival of the gunships a V. C. platoon lay dead with their weapons. They fell in front of the pagoda where they had sought refuge. Faced with such firepower, the Communists had no choice but to retreat in the direction of the cemetery. Close to the cemetery was a concrete house which the insurgents promptly occupied. Meanwhile the Rangers also had assaulted two nearby houses and killed three insurgents whose bodies could be seen from hundreds of yards away.

By this time the fighting had developed into an immense



Brown Beret of the 38th Ranger Battalion advancing through a screen of smoke in their tank supported attack on the Binh Hoa intersection (the fourth day of the year of the Monkey).



Brown Berets assaulting a Communist position at the Binh Hoa intersection in Gia Dinh.

game of hide-and-seek. A new dimension was added by two fires burning at the Esso gas station at the Binh-Hoa Intersection and the Bach Tuyet Paint factory. From these points Communist snipers had been harassing the advancing troops. Though choking in the smoky atmosphere, the Brown Berets still continued their advance. They had barely left the gas station when two of them were hit.

The Ranger column was immediately divided into small groups to search the many alleys and side streets of the area while some of them made a pincer movement in order to catch the Communists by surprise. They received more V. C. sniper fire as they reached the paint factory.

The fighting lasted quite a few hours even though the Viet Cong were not very numerous in this particular area. The terrain presented immense difficulties which were complicated by the thousands of civilians living in hundreds of houses and huts throughout the area, thus preventing government troops from taking full advantage of their firepower.

On 2 February the Forty-First Ranger Battalion was helilifted from Tuy Hoa to reinforce the Saigon battle and the fighting in the Binh Hoa intersection soon died.

5. Elsewhere in Saigon. Elsewhere in the capital city fighting continued on a scattered basis. Small groups of infiltrators continued harassing friendly forces from their positions in populated areas. Some of these even included women cadre. .

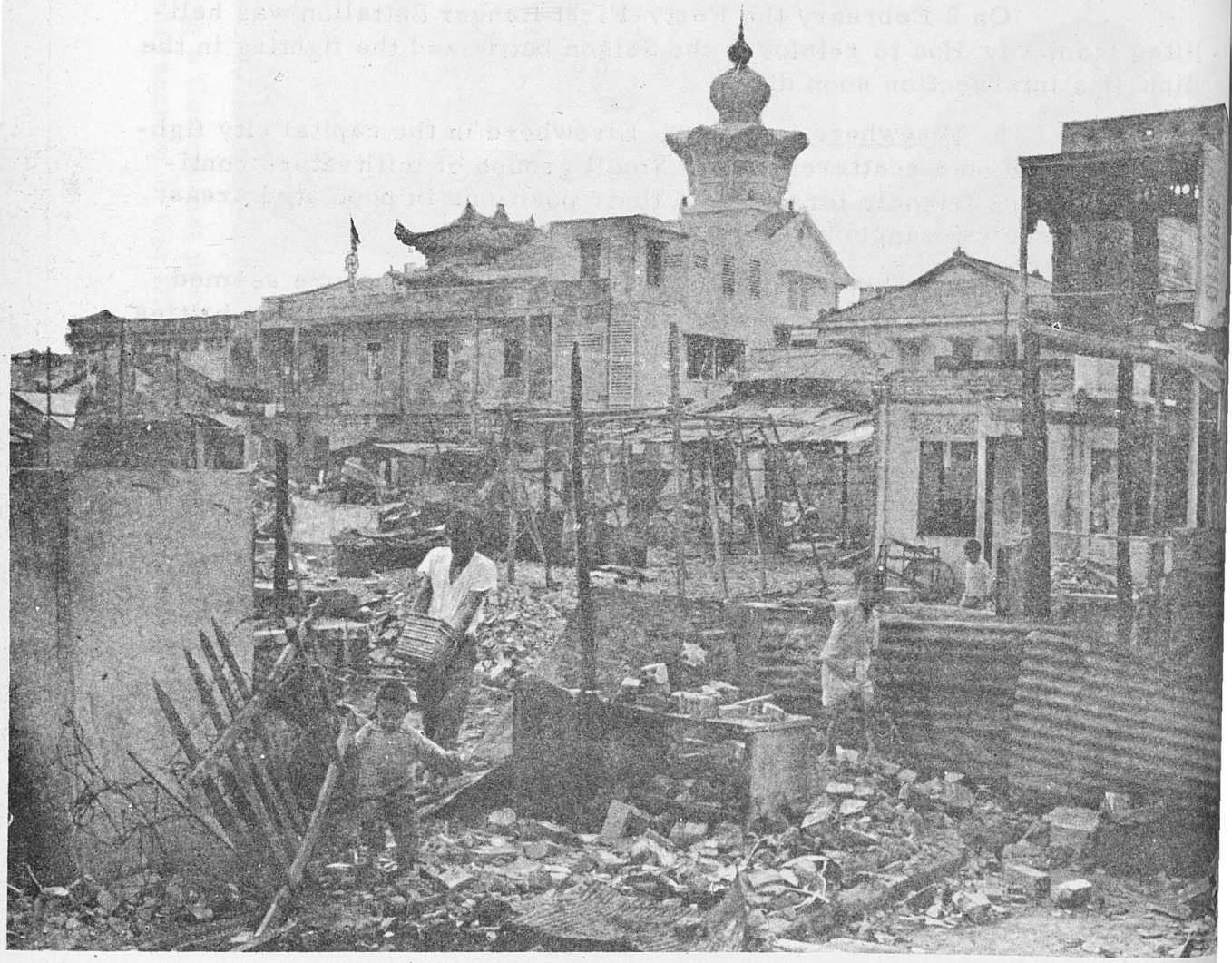
In the Chinese section of Saigon enemy pressure seemed to increase with each passing day. Although there were no major battles, indications were many that two Viet Cong battalions - Long An 508 Binh Tan Six - were still very active in the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Precincts. This despite heavy losses during the previous days.

Government soldiers had to block practically all streets and eliminate the infiltrators one by one to counter this threat. Fires had broken out here and there and the population in threatened areas had left to seek greater security elsewhere.

Typical of the difficulty faced was the situation in the Seventh Precinct where enemy pressure had been acutely felt since 31 January, especially in the Binh-An Catholic diocese of Bishop Hoang-Quynh, one of South Vietnam's most noted anti-Communist fighters. For several days the rumor had spread around town that Father Quynh had been killed. This was immediately denied.



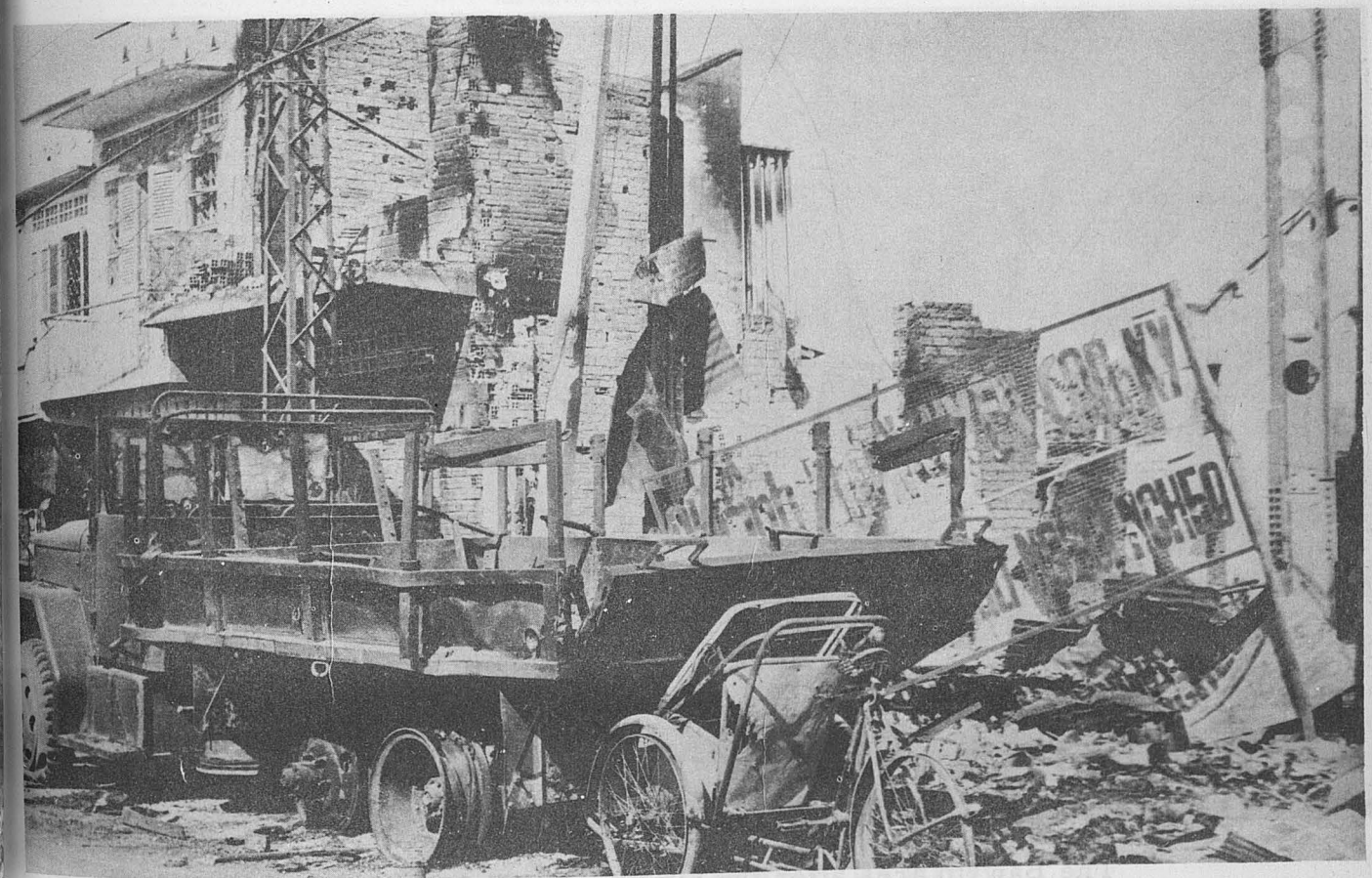
Firemen extinguishing blaze near the An Quang Pagoda on the 1st of February 1968.



The charred remains of buildings near the An Quang Pagoda.



A South Vietnamese Marine from the 2nd Battalion amongst refugees near the An Quang Pagoda.



Nguyen Van Thoai boulevard during the Viet Cong Tet offensive



Firemen in action on Nguyen Thien Thuat street (1 Feb. 1968)



The Ban Co area after the big fire of 7 February 1968.



Communist bodies in the Van Hanh street after the Feb. 8 battle.



A VC prisoner taken on Trieu Da street.



South Vietnamese Marines deployed on a street in Cholon



Firing on the enemy

To break the enemy's grip in this area,the Third and Fourth Companies of the 33rd Ranger were brought in from Binh Chanh district. The Brown Berets did their best to eliminate the infiltrators but it took them eight days to reduce the enemy pressure. By that time over 100 Viet Cong had been killed, eight taken prisoner and 37 weapons captured which included two crew-served weapons.

During the night of 4 February small groups of three to ten Viet Cong moved along many of the alleys that lead from Phan Đinh Phung Street to the Vuon Ba Lon area on Nguyen Thien Thuat Street. Wherever they went,the people became frightened and did their best to get away.

Once again the 38th Ranger Battalion was dispatched to this area. The Brown Berets immediately set up their command post atop a five-storied building on Nguyen Thien Thuat Street. They set out to find the enemy, especially in alley 2/3, a 30-yard large blind alley cut by a group of apartment houses facing Phan Thanh Gian and Phan Đinh Phung Streets.

The main V. C. resistance group had elected to stay in a two-storied house located at N°. 613/23 Nguyen Thien Thuat from which they harassed the government troops. The Brown Berets immediately reacted with intense counterfire from taller buildings in the vicinity to support their comrades in the street. The enemy fire remained steady until the arrival of government reinforcements later in the day.

Before assaulting the enemy position, government troops had called on the insurgents to surrender and requested the population to evacuate the area. The Viet Cong not only refused to stop fighting but also directed their fire at loudspeaker positions. Immediately gunships were called in to dislodge the enemy from the Đo Huu Vi ancestral house in the Vuon Ba Lon area. Viet Cong troops responded by setting fire to quite a few civilian houses to help them escape.

A big fire started at two different places spreading from Phan Đinh Phung Street to Vuon Ba Lon and vice versa. At its very start, fire engines had arrived on the scene but they were shot at by the Viet Cong who thus prevented the gallant copper-helmeted agents from their duties.

At that very moment Police Director General Nguyen Ngoc Loan appeared aboard a jeep equipped with a 90mm recoiless

rifle. Two well placed rounds immediately resulted in the death of four enemy soldiers at the Communist command post. The event was followed by a ground assault by the Ranger troops who immediately killed another three insurgents.

Government troops then began a sweep of the area, visiting and thoroughly searching each house. In one of these, a most moving spectacle offered itself to their view : amidst the thunder of war and destruction, a Buddhist monk was deep in meditation. The soldiers withdrew at once, respectful of the religious leader as they always have been told to be. But the priest turned out to be a fake. He drew out a pistol and shot, killing one of the soldiers. He then tried to escape. He had hardly made three steps when another soldier angrily fired his gun at him,killing the fake monk and confiscating his pistol.

Taking advantage of the great confusion,the Viet Cong withdrew in the direction of Ba Hat and Su Van Hanh streets leaving the area under government control. A fleet of 20 fire engines was immediately brought to the scene and by 1700 hours, the fire was extinguished. Three hundred houses had been burned to the ground. In the meantime government soldiers had killed ten insurgents and captured another two.

Faced with such a situation,the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN) did its best to keep the population calm. It also issued a series of measures to help stabilize the situation.

On the third day of the Year of the Monkey President Nguyen Van Thieu went on the air requesting the population to keep calm and help Allied troops in re-establishing order in the cities. He also declared martial law throughout the land and temporarily closed down all amusement centers while forbidding all gatherings.

That very day, General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces issued an order of the day to all his troops,charging the Viet Cong with violating the truce order they had themselves ordered. He also gave the people an idea of the military situation throughout the Republic and urged the troops to defeat the Communist plan of offensive at any costs.

That morning the Cabinet also met in a special session that resulted in a special condemnation of the National Liberation

Front and a statement reminding the people of the martial law order and an edict re-establishing press censorship and promising to take all necessary measures to come to the help of war victims.

On 3 February 1968, President Thieu signed Decree 644/SL creating relief committees in Saigon as well as in the provinces and appointing Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky Chairman of the Central Relief Organization. The following day General Vien again issued another order of the day citing, before the Armed Forces, all corps areas, divisions, and such branches as Airborne, the Ranger, the Marine, the Special Forces, the Capital Security Group, Regiments 42 and 51, the Navy, the Air Force, the Armored branch, and rewarding many a good fighter.

Following this, General Vien also ordered the launching of Operation Tran Hung Dao to dislodge the enemy from Saigon. At that time the situation in Saigon had much improved but the enemy was still relatively strong. Estimate :

All over the operational areas only scattered action was recorded except in Zone "D", where besides instances of fighting near the Kieu Cong Muoi Police Station,the Viet Cong still made their presence felt rather acutely in the northwest part of the Sixth Precinct and the southeastern part of the Eighth Precinct.

During the night of 4 February enemy elements took over the Binh Tay Alcohol Distillery installation. The 41st Ranger Battalion was immediately dispatched to reoccupy the installation. The Viet Cong also harassed the Nguyen Van To Police Station and attacked the Tran Van Chau Police Station in the Eighth Precinct. Another group of enemy soldiers also penetrated the staging area on Ly Thai To street.

In the fighting at Kieu Cong Muoi Police Station,government troops killed six Viet Cong and captured five individual weapons. Police also fought the insurgents on Phan Dinh Phung street, killing a number of them, capturing two and confiscating one B.40 rocket launcher. In the Hanh Thong Tay area too,contact was established with the enemy. In the security belt around the capital city U.S. troops also reported clashing with the insurgents on more than one occasion.

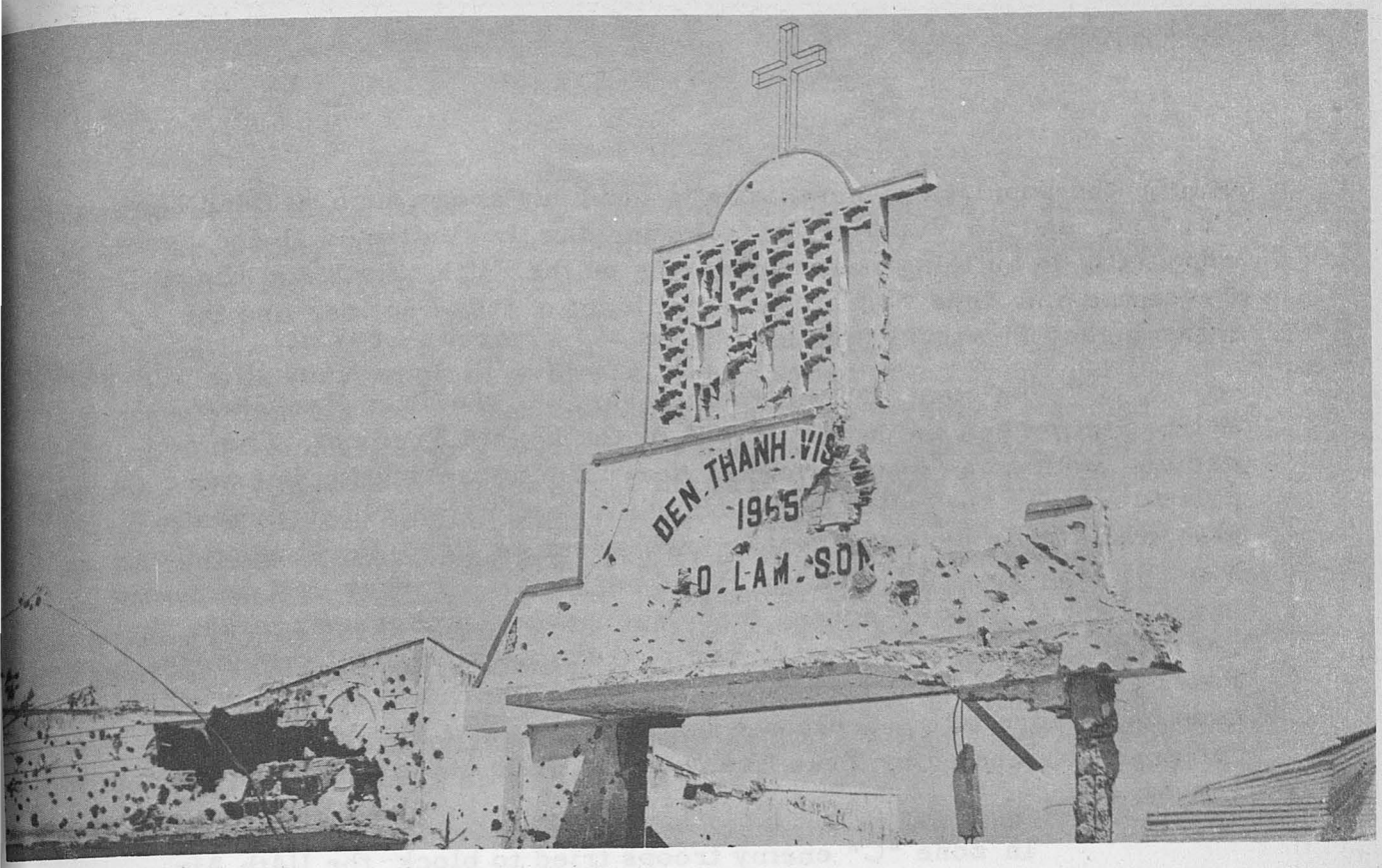
Of the general situation in Saigon it can be said that by the 5th of February, enemy main force units had withdrawn to the outskirts but some enemy sapper elements still did their best to hide



One of the many Communist fortifications prior to the battle of Xom Dua.



VC bodies in Xom Dua on 6 February 1968



Xom Moi Church after the VC Tet offensive



Xom Moi area after the battle

within the population, especially in populous areas. such as Binh Dong, Phu Tho, and Go Vap. On the following day they initiated 18 incidents, especially in outlying areas bordering on the Fifth, Sixth and Eighth Precincts and Zone "A". Most significant of these actions are the following.

In zone "D" the enemy assaulted the Tran Van Chau Police Station and the headquarters of the Eighth Precinct. The Vietnamese policemen were forced to leave the police station but were able to return the following morning. An estimated 200 insurgents also made their pressure felt in such areas as Road 46, Truong Cong Dinh Street, Road 39, and the Phu Lam area. A ranger unit operating in this part of the city sprang many successful ambushes against the intruders. The Rangers lost in one of these ambushes, at the corner of Tan Da and Binh Dong Streets, six of their comrades. By early afternoon once more a fire broke out, destroying quite a few houses in the rectangle delineated by Tran Hoang Quan, Minh Mang and Tran Nhan Ton Streets.

In zone "C" enemy troops tried to block the 114th Airborne Company at the corner of Tong Doc Phuong and Khong-Tu Streets when this unit was dispatched to reinforce the "D" Command. But the most remarkable of all battles recorded that day was the one that took place at the Xom Moi area of Go Vap district where an element of the Third Airborne Task Force opposed a Communist battalion less than a mile northeast of Co Loa Camp.

At the start of the battle an armored element dispatched to the Lang Son and Xom Dua wards was attacked by withering fire from machineguns and B.40 individual rocket launchers This fire resulted in the destruction of an armored vehicle and damage to an M.41 tank. At that point helicopter gunships were brought in resulting in the upturn in the morale of friendly troops and a sentiment of desperation on the part of the enemy who immediately hoisted a white flag.

South Vietnamese troops immediately stopped all offensive actions, getting ready to welcome their stray brothers. But the Viet Cong did it simply as a tactic to escape the noose around their neck which was simply too tight to break away. A total of 120 Viet Cong were killed and 35 of their weapons captured while the government troops recorded 16 dead and 42 wounded. On the following day, the airborne troopers continued to meet with strong Communist

resistance in the area of Thong Tay Hoi northwest of Co Loa Camp. In this area they killed 60 Communists, captured 30 enemy weapons while suffering only ten wounded.

On 7-8 February, however, enemy pressure in zone "D" was still very much in evidence. Many squad or company groups constantly roamed the Su Van Hanh area, burning a ranger jeep,and killing and wounding four government soldiers on Tran Hoang Quan Street. They also set fire to a rice depot in Binh Dong which took firemen two hours to extinguish. They set fire to a paper factory at the corner of Hau Giang and Dong Thap Streets. There was a period of intense fighting when the 30th Ranger Battalion encountered a strong enemy force south of the Kinh Doi Canal and the Sixth Marine Battalion came across a similar V.C. group in the Rach Chiec area. The 38th Ranger Battalion also recorded a big fight on Minh Phung Avenue that resulted in five government soldiers killed, another ten wounded,and the loss of an armored car.

Here follows the story of that important battle :

On 8 February, the 38th Ranger Battalion began a sweep at a little past noon with the objective of eliminating the V.C. intruders from a relatively large area. Starting from Lo Sieu Street,the battalion divided itself into two wings,one under the command of its commander only identified as Captain Bang, and the other under the deputy commanding officer, Lieutenant Nghenh.

Captain Bang led Companies 1 and 2 in a sweep of the Luc Tinh Road reaching to the bridge of Phu Lam. Lieutenant Nghenh led the two remaining companies in another sweep of the triangle delineated by Boulevard Tran Quoc Toan, Minh Phung Street and Road 46. Nghenh's troops were supported by an armored group, a marine element, and civil operations troops from the Political Warfare Department. It was this second wing which clashed with the enemy most ferociously.

At 1330 hours as the Third Company under the command of Lieutenant Chinh arrived at Duy Linh Park, it came under intense enemy fire. Viet Cong troops apparently had captured a bus with which they blocked Minh Phung Street and from where they attacked the government unit. But in spite of the intensity of the enemy fire, the assault element of Chinh's company continued its counterattack.

Soon over 100 troops were hitting from all directions

at the Viet Cong resistance spot,forcing the enemy to withdraw in the direction of Alley 235. The V.C.-held bus was captured. But at that very minute V.C. machinegun fire was directed on the attacking element from a multistoried building nearby. Two armored cars immediately advanced in that direction but a hail of B.40 rockets prevented them from doing any good.

At the same time the local population poured out into the street in an effort to get away from the battle zone. This forced the Rangers to temporarily cease fire while Polwar troops continued to encourage those too scared to leave the battle area. In spite of the enemy's effort to keep them as hostages,the people turned their back to the foe and left.

By 1600 hours the battle resumed with government soldiers fanning out under the protection of gunships criscrossing the sky and firing on enemy positions as indicated to them by the ground troops through smoke grenades. In their effort to resist the advancing Rangers,the insurgents succeeded in wounding Lieutenant Nghenh but the deputy battalion commander simply had his bloody nose bandaged and continued to lead his troops in the attack.

After restoring order in Minh-Phung,the troops started sweeping the many alleys in this area. The Viet Cong retreated in the direction of Xom Dat and to protect their withdrawal set fire to many houses. The fire spread rapidly but it only reached Huynh Tan Phat shop where it was extinguished by the soldiers turned firemen. The rangers also turned relief workers when they helped the people take their possessions to the Minh-Phung Elementary School which was to serve as refugee center for the following months.

By early evening the whole area was liberated. An MP aspirant or warrant officer and a private second class who had been kidnapped by the insurgents were freed. They told the operating troops that enemy strength in the area was about 30 Viet Cong armed with AK.47 automatic rifles, B.40 rocket launchers, and machineguns.

Meanwhile a combined Police-Ranger force had also clashed with the enemy in the area of Su Van Hanh, Tran Hoang Quan, Tran Nhan Ton, and Minh Mang Streets. While losing only two dead and 15 wounded the government troops killed 15 Viet Cong, captured 17 others including a senior captain who was deputy commander of the Binh Tan Sixth Battalion, and confiscated 17 weapons including two B.40's.

Let it also be said that early that evening, enemy troops also fired at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador in a different area of the sprawling city. They did it from the Mac Dinh Chi cemetery which practically borders on the villa of Mr. Ellsworth Bunker .

From the above it can be said that although enemy activity indicated a definite decline, especially in the suburban areas, his pressure on the confines of the Fifth and Sixth Precincts was very much in evidence. His troops started what later was called city guerrilla war by trying to stay as close as possible to the people from whom they could extort food and information and among whom they could hide to reappear again once government soldiers left for another area.

Because communist pressure was determined to be most intense in zone "D" its command was to be given additional troops. These included a U.S. mechanized company to replace the 30th Ranger Battalion assigned to the Seventh Precinct, an American infantry battalion assigned to Phu Tho Hoa in replacement of the 33rd Ranger Battalion, a battalion of signal students named Battalion Tran Nguyen Han, and a battalion of artillery students baptised for that occasion Battalion An Duong Vuong.

On 10 February, the military command of zone "D" redeployed its troops in the form of two task forces. Task Force One which included the 33rd and 38th Ranger Battalions, a Ranger reconnaissance company, an armored squadron, and Battalion Tran Nguyen Han was tasked to take control of the Phu Lam area and all areas to the northwest. This unit also had the task of preventing any enemy attacks from the outside against the Sixth Precinct.

Task Force Two which included the 41st and 30th Ranger Battalions and Battalion An Duong Vuong was to take over control of the Seventh and Eighth Precincts. It also had the task of protecting the many depots and industrial installations in this important area.

As of 9 February the command of zone "D" had moved to the Cay Mai School from where it directed all operations. Prior to launching Operation Tran Hung Dao, a battalion of airborne student had been operating in this area but on 10 February this battalion was sent to another area.

Also participating in operation Tran Hung Dao were some 2,500 Revolutionary Development cadre dispatched to Saigon



Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky inspecting pacification cadres recently arrived from Vung Tau to take part in operation Tran Hung Dao (5 Feb.). On the left is Major General Nguyen Duc Thang, Pacification Minister.



This banderol reads :'Pacification cadres are determined to heal the wounds of the people inflicted by the VC'



Buddhist Chaplains join in the relief campaign for those made homeless by the war.



All government and private agencies assist victims of the VC Tet offensive

from their training center at Vung Tau. Arriving in Saigon aboard Navy ships on 5 February, they immediately opened dozens of refugee relief centers throughout the city. Prior to sending them to their new assignment, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky visited them on 7 February.

A total of 37 refugee centers were established by the RD cadres. Most were located in schools and churches and catered to an estimated 86,000 refugees. These refugees were located at the Dinh Tien Hoang Primary School, the Tan Dinh Church, the Vinh Nghiem Pagoda, the Chua Cuu The Church, the Thanh Can Center, the Labor Inspectorate Camp, the Saint Thomas Church, the Phat Diem Church, the Vuon Chuoi Primary School, the headquarters of the Red Cross, the Nhi Dong Hospital, the Bac Ha Church, the Hoi Duc Anh Association, the Cho Ray Hospital, the Cha Tam Church, the Duc Minh School, the Giac Ngan Pagoda, the Chan Phuoc Liem School, the Don Bosco School, the Bui Phat Center, the Vinh Son Church, the Huyen Si Church, the Tu Du Hospital, and many privately contributed sites.

Along with the troops all other segments of the South Vietnamese population joined in the common fight. On 9 February 1969 both Houses of Congress met in a joint session at Dien Hong Palace following the publication of a five point resolution grouping the signatures of 41 members of the Upper House. These points are roughly as follows :

(1) Denounce the Viet Cong for taking advantage of the truce order to assault the cities of South Vietnam, bringing about death and destruction on an unprecedented scale, and for making use of pagodas, churches, hospitals and school for military purposes; (2) Request the government to help war victims and demand better protection for the people; (3) Welcome the effective assistance of Allied troops; (4) Express their gratitude for all those who have contributed to the defense of their fatherland; and (5) Welcome all efforts that may result in better unity and stronger solidarity among the people and the government in their task of self-preservation.

The House of Representatives, too, was to issue a similar proclamation, giving their support to the fight against Communism.

A few hours after the Representatives and the Senators met, the Viet Cong again launched an attack on the Nguyen Van Qua Police Station on Nguyen Tri Phuong Boulevard. From the corner of

Hoa Hao Street and Nguyen Tri Phuong Boulevard the enemy hit the police station with machinegun fire and B.40 rockets. But they could not over come the withering fire directed at them from a multistoried building occupied by police nearby.

Stopped in this direction,the insurgents sent B.40 rockets in another direction, damaging part of the Minh Mang Primary School and setting fire to an Army vehicle. This was to draw in their direction at least 100 grenades of the M.79 type. Meanwhile Viet Cong troops from small alleys behind the police station rallied for a forceful attack on the target but this too failed. In the course of this battle the Rangers captured eight AK.47, one B.40 rocket launcher, two pistols made in Communist China, and killed 15 enemy soldiers.

A few hours following this battle,an element of the Viet Cong 101st Regiment - which is part of the CT.7 Division - tried to penetrate Xom Moi after being dislodged from the area by airborne troops on 6 February. The infiltrators immediately began a ground assault on Depot 531 and the fuel storage area called Camp 30. This was to result in 20 government troops wounded, the destruction of two towers, and the explosion of some 2,000 rounds of 105mm cannon ammunition. V.C. losses were 16 killed and nine weapons captured.

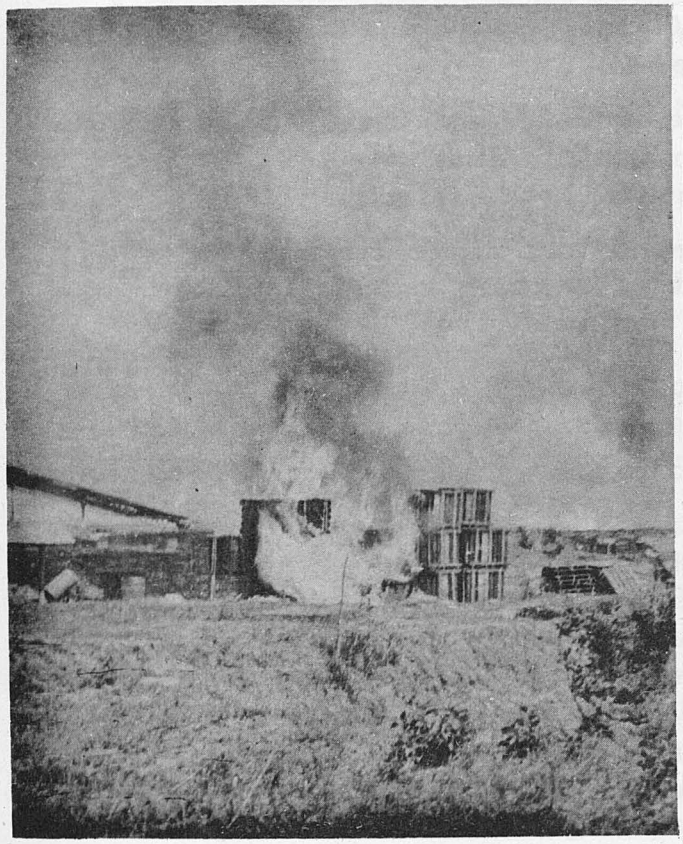
During the same night enemy troops also harassed guards at the Radio Station and resisted, often briefly, Allied patrols in the areas of Phu Dinh, Hau Giang, Road 46 and Tran Hoang Quan Street

The following two days enemy activity drastically decreased in all above mentioned areas as the commanding element of Battalion Binh Tan Six and the 101st Regiment recorded paralyzing losses. Within the city of Saigon itself only scattered action was reported,This action was initiated by especially armed propaganda teams left behind by the enemy in such areas as Tran Hoang Quan, Minh Phung, Trieu Da, Tran Nhan Ton.

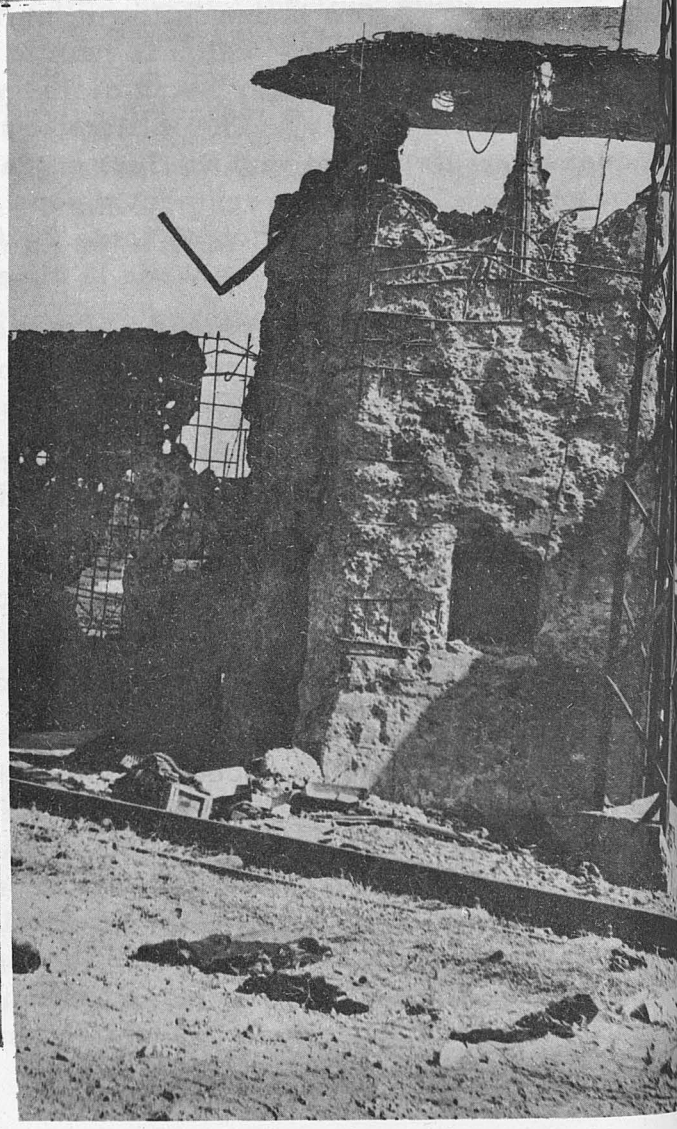
The enemy situation was recorded as follows : the Binh Tan Sixth Battalion had completely withdrawn from the city, enemy elements operating in Xom Moi had crossed the small river of Ben Cat to seek refuge in An Phu Dong, Battalion Di An Three had left Binh Dong for a further area, Battalion Thu Duc Four had chosen domicile in Long Truong some five miles Southeast of Thu-Duc, Battalion Nha Be Five had retired to Long Dien, Battalion 508 had made its way to Da Phuoc some four miles southwest of the Seventh Precinct, and Battalions 267 and 269 had sought survival by making



Airborne troops launching the final assault against an ammunition depot



Explosion of 2,000 rounds of 105mm ammo.



Blockhouse at Depot 351 following a VC attack.

it to Vinh Loc about six miles west of Ba Queo.

About 100 stray soldiers remained from the Viet Cong force that initially attacked Saigon. They sometimes betrayed themselves in zones "A", "D" and "C" by foolishly firing on patrol boats going up the Lo Gom river, medical teams operating in the Minh Phung area, and some troops of the 30th Ranger Battalion north of Phu Dinh, etc...

Again on 12 February South Vietnamese Ranger elements launched a sweep of the suburb of Phu Lam, which went through the following stages :

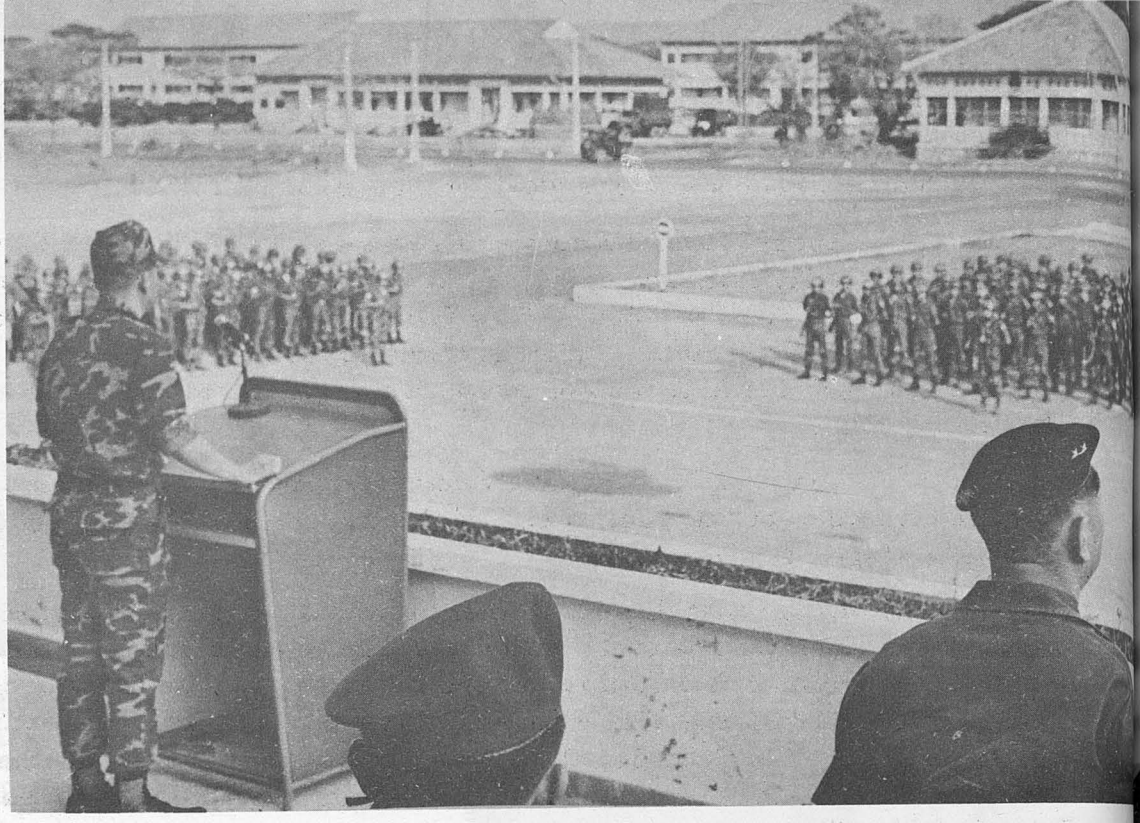
Early that day as element of the 38th Ranger Battalion crossed the Rach Cau Sat,they killed a Viet Cong and captured another one. The battalion immediately got the order to continue its march to join strength with the 30th Ranger Battalion which was controlling both sides of the Lo Gom Canal. It was planned that from a southeastern direction both battalions would drive the enemy to the areas of Hoa Dong and My Thuan.

Earlier the 41st Ranger Battalion had been heliborne to an area south of the Rach Cat Road in Phu Lam, and an armored element was also dispatched to help the attacking troops to advance in the direction of Hoa Dong and My Thuan. In the ensuing fight the 30th Ranger Battalion killed a total of 26 Viet Cong and captured eight weapons. Although not exactly successful,this battle was to mark the beginning of the end for the Viet Cong in the city. All later fighting was to take place in suburban areas or areas adjoining on the outskirts.

Of the many battles recorded just outside Saigon,let it be recalled here that most successful was one involving a U.S. element that took place on the afternoon of 11 February. In this encounter the enemy suffered 47 dead, two captured, and 34 weapons confiscated while six Americans were killed and 15 wounded. Captured documents showed that most Viet Cong killed were part of the "R" Vanguard Command and escort elements. It was also said that V.C. General Tran Do was killed in this encounter. This information however, has not been confirmed by intelligence agencies.

In a night operation launched by U.S. troops,U.S. Battalion 4/39 clashed with the enemy in Hung Long,killing 154 Communists and capturing one. The P.W. told his interrogators that he belonged to the 2nd Independent Battalion in Long An. Most enemy casualties

General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, addressing the troops at the end of the Tran Hung Dao campaign.

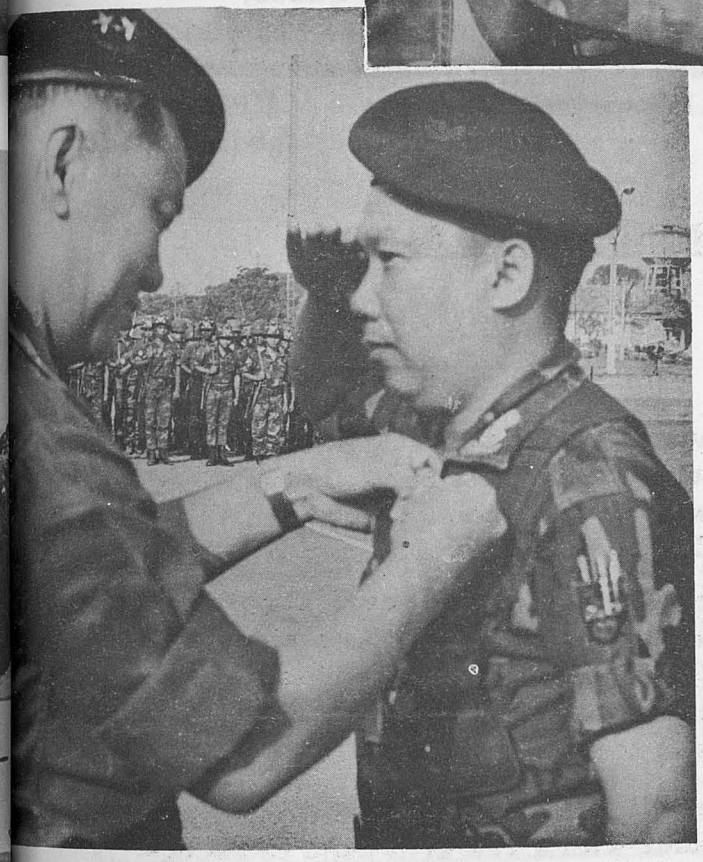




From right to left :
MG Nguyen Van La, Tran Thanh Phong, Lu Lan, Du Quoc Dong and BG Tran Van Minh, Ngo Dzu.



General Cao Van Vien decorating Colonel Tran Van Hai, Ranger Commander.



Major General Nguyen Van La, Deputy Chief of the Joint General Staff, decorating LTC Dao Ba Phuoc, Commander of the Fifth Ranger Group.



were credited to air strikes. The ground troops suffered no casualties.

At this point it became evident to every one that the Viet Cong attack on Saigon had failed. All intruders had been swept outside the metropolis. In the following days normalcy was speedily restored and the operational command of Operation Tran Hung Dao, which was under General Cao Van Vien, was disbanded on 17 February. This was marked by a simple but moving ceremony at the Joint General Staff Headquarters in the course of which General Vien himselves presented well deserving soldiers with the nation's most coveted decorations.

Operation Tran Hung Dao,however, was not terminated. It became the responsibility of Lieutenant General Le Nguyen Khang, who was serving as III Corps commander. The division of Saigon into Zones "A", "B", "C", "D", and "E" was retained. Their commanders were also retained except for Lieutenant Colonel Dao Ba Phuoc, commander of Zone "D", who took over from Colonel Tran Van Hai, Zone "F" which had been an American responsibility was added to Zone "D".

MAJOR ATTACKS IN AND AROUND SAIGON

U.S. Embassy

During the night of January 30-31 at a little past three AM, a Citroen sedan carrying 19 Viet Cong sappers sped in the direction of the U.S. Embassy in downtown Saigon. Driven by Nguyen Van Muoi,it stopped near the American Chancery on Mac Dinh Chi Street.

There the sappers rushed from the small car, shooting to death the two U.S. military policemen standing guard at a side gate. Meanwhile, another Viet Cong using a 3,5 recoilless rifle blasted a hole in the wall, permitting the group leader to enter the ground of the Embassy Building and break the lock of the gate.

In the matter of minutes all the group penetrated the Embassy grounds.Clad in black and blue with a red arm band to recognize one another in the dark easily,they immediately organize themselves and began attacking the Embassy compound.

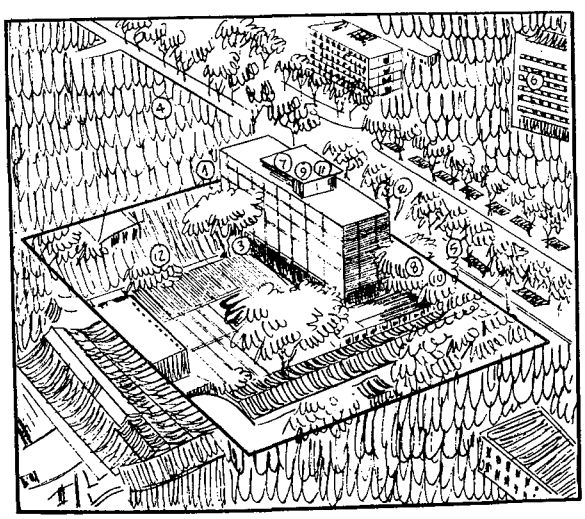
At the time of the assault there were six civilian employees working in the communications room on the fourth floor of the building. Immediately notified of the Viet Cong presence, they at once locked themselves in the bunker like building.

Two U.S. Marines, standing guard on the ground floor rushed to the teak wood gate to try to defend it. A B.40 rocket-grenade wounded one of them. However, the Americans succeeded in locking the door that successfully resisted all Communist attempts to break through.

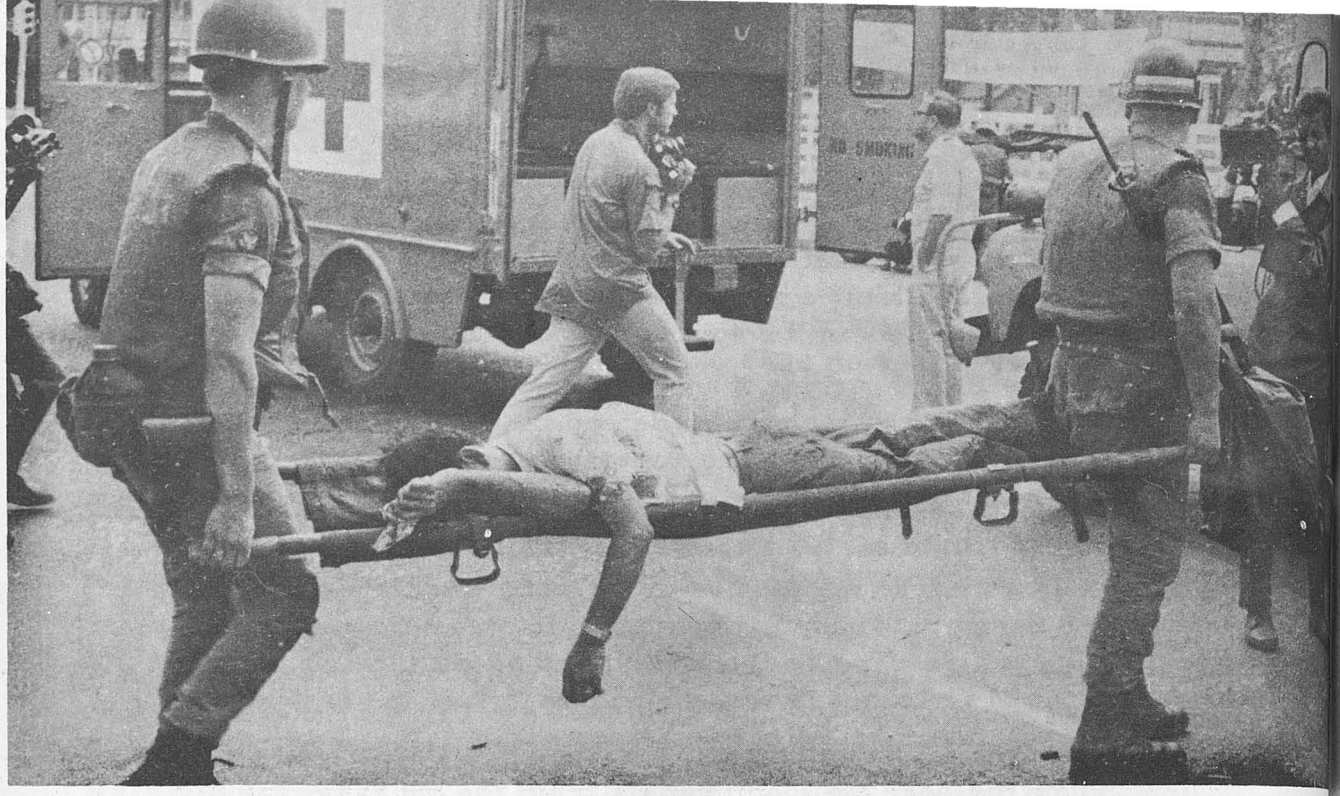
Twenty four minutes later an M.P. reinforcement group arrived on the scene but found it impossible to break through the Communist barrage of fire. Two of the MP's tried to get through but were shot dead by the V.C. sappers who took advantage of the darkness and the terrain to put up a most effective resistance.

To dislodge the Communists from the Embassy, the U.S. High Command had to bring in troops by helicopters but V.C. firepower was so intense that all attempts to land failed until about 9 AM. Prior to 9 AM a group of American M.P.'s assaulted the Communist force through the main gate.

VC ATTACK OF THE US EMBASSY



(1) 0254h The wall is breached
(2) Enemy fires B40 at the Embassy's main gate
(3) Enemy looks for a way in
(4) A US security officer fires at the enemy from a church
(5) US M.P. Come for rescue
(6) US M.P. Fire at VC from the building
(7) 0530h. US helicopters try to land on top of the Embassy
(8) US M.P. Make a breach to enter the Embassy
(9) V.C. Fire at the landing helicopters
(10) US M.P. Occupy a dominant position
(11) 0835h. Helicopters land on the Embassy
(12) 0900h. The M.P. hurt the last enemy and col. Jacobson kills him to end the fight.



Immediately after Communist sappers were dislodged from the US Embassy, American military police took dead Viet Cong away for burial.



On that first day of the Communist offensive, General William C. Westmoreland, US Commander in Vietnam, came for a look at the embattled embassy building in up town Saigon.

Thanks to Private First Class Paul Healey who took upon himself the task of leading his comrades, the M.P.'s succeeded in breaking through. A hand-to-hand fight ensued that resulted in the elimination of all but one of the Viet Cong who sought refuge in a two-storied house next to the main building. The house was occupied by Colonel (ret.) George Jacobson, a member of the Embassy staff.

As the Viet Cong took possession of the ground floor of the little house, Colonel Jacobson was defenseless upstairs. Troops in the garden directed their fire at suspected V.C. positions.

Finally they threw a few tear gas grenades and a pistol to Colonel Jacobson, who was then in a position to kill the last Viet Cong in the building. This brought the Battle of the Embassy to an end.

It took six hours for the U.S. troops to kill the nineteen Viet Cong. American losses were five fatalities.

The Navy Headquarters

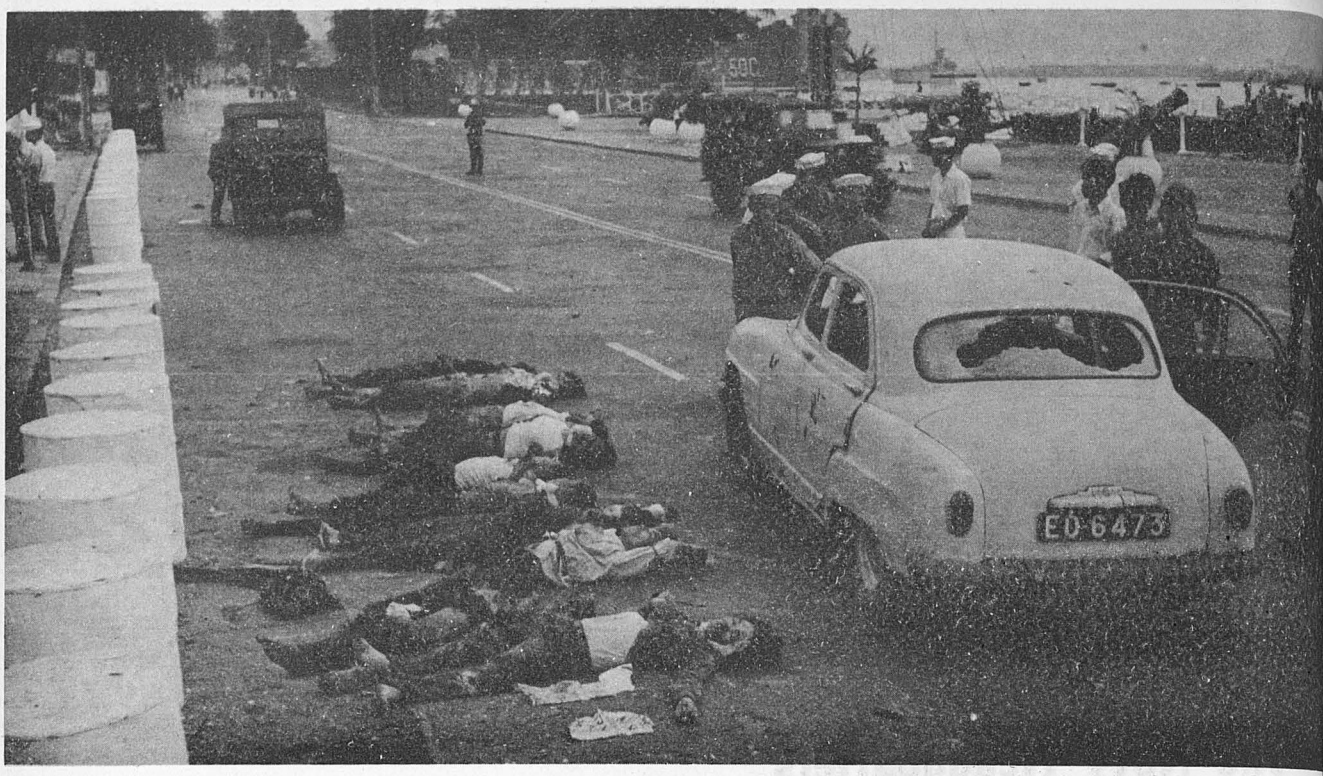
In the early hours of the second day of the Year of the Monkey, more exactly at 0250 hours, a sapper squad group of 12 Viet Cong of the F/1 Sapper Unit under the command of Bay Lop attacked the headquarters of the South Vietnamese Navy.

Equipped with automatic rifles of the AK family, hand grenades, and explosive, they arrived on the scene clad in civilian clothes but wearing the armband of the Capital Security Service. They reached their assigned target in two civilian cars, one painted green and the other painted white and bearing the plate number of ED.6473.

Immediately on arrival the Communists opened fire on soldiers standing guard on the Cuu Long Bridge that stands opposite the statue of Tran Hung Dao. The first Communist car stopped close to the night barricade from where the insurgents directed their intense fire on the friendly position.

From the guard post two Navymen returned the fire with their pistols and the explosions brought to the scene a group of sailors stationed at headquarters as reserves. One of the attackers, then another, were immediately brought down as they approached the barricades.

But the insurgents continued their advance from the Me-Linh Plazza. The exchange of fire grew more intense. By about 0305 hours a patrol car arrived on the scene from the direction of the Thu-



All Viet Cong troops taking part in the assault on the Navy Headquarters were killed. This photo taken on 31 January 1968 show some ten VC bodies and the car they had used to come to their death row.



VC sappers killed by Airborne troops in front of the Radio station.

ngu Bridge, only to be hit by Communist fire. Two U.S. patrolmen were wounded and the American jeep turned upside down when its driver tried to veer right to get out of the firing zone.

Meanwhile, the enemy continued his pressure on the entrance to the Navy Headquarters. While a Viet Cong group kept a steady rate of fire on the defending Navymen, another group tried to bring in some explosives with the evident intention of blowing up the gate and penetrating the headquarters building.

From the first floor of the building Navymen tried to keep the intruders at a distance. Three of the intruders were shot as they reached the gate. The exchange continued but some of the Communists succeeded in blowing a hole in the wall of the sentry post from where two of them tried to sneak in. They were killed as they entered.

Fifteen minutes later the fight came to an end. A reconnaissance team was at once dispatched to kill the remaining V.C. agents or to take them prisoners. One of them tried to flee but the man had barely reached the BGI building when he was captured by U.S. soldiers in the area.

The final result was ten Viet Cong dead, two captured, seven AK rifles, one Chinese Communist pistol and 200 pounds of explosives confiscated. On the government side two Navymen made the supreme sacrifice while another nine were wounded.

The relatively speedy repulse of the Communists from the area can be explained by one single development. As a rule only troops on guard are armed, but on that night following the alert order of the Joint General Staff that came a little before midnight, all the soldiers present were issued individual weapons. Therefore, when the enemy tried to breach the defense perimeter his troops met with strong resistance from the defenders.

According to the Viet Cong plan they had planned to occupy the Navy headquarters speedily and from there sweep troops down the anchored ships to take possession of the vessels. They also had planned to use the capture ships to support a contemplated mass uprising.

Some other attacks

Meanwhile, the intruders also tried to stage many other attacks in various strategically important positions in the capital.

They tried in the very first hours of the offensive to take possession of the Phu Dong Armored Camp from where they could deploy captured vehicles against other installations. For this undertaking they brought quite a few drivers along but although they succeeding in taking over the camp the enemy found no vehicles. All these had been issued to the units in the field just prior to the holiday season.

However, the Communists could claim to have occupied one of the most important military installations in town. But this was not much of a feat since the Armor Headquarters was guarded by only 40 troops. The enemy succeeded in capturing these 40 troops immediately after entering the camp.

Prior to their withdrawal from the area the insurgents killed practically every one including Lieutenant Colonels Nguyen Tuan and Huynh Ngoc Diep. All of the Tuan family were murdered except for a ten year old child.

A few days later residents in this area saw commando cars going up and down the street. They had come from the Go-Vap subsector and besides taking care of the defense of the area they took upon themselves the task of evacuating wounded soldiers from battle area to the nearby Cong Hoa general hospital.

A similar development was recorded in the artillery area, which groups the Co Loa and No Than camps, that houses the Artillery Command and the officers of some artillery battalions. Unable to penetrate the strongly defended No Than camp the enemy succeeded in entering the weakly defended Co Loa Camp.

Although warned of an small impending attack, the local garrison found itself resisting a large scale onslaught. The intruders struck suddenly in force at the Northwestern Gate. The camp was saved from occupation and destruction by the speedy reaction of a group of gunners who fired their big guns at pointblank range at the enemy.

Following this first unsuccessful attack, the enemy brought in more troops from Go Vap. These troops came to the battle scene on motorcycles. Meanwhile they pounded the installation with mortars and tried their best to penetrate the officers'quarters in an effort to capture as many prisoners as possible.

Throughout the second day of the New Year the insurgents stepped up their pressure and tried to take over the military prison in the vicinity. They failed in all their attempts in spite of our inability to bring in reinforcements.

On the following day a Marine task force came to the rescue of the besieged garrison. In the wake of quite a few bloody engagement the two battalion task force get the situation under control. On the fourth day of the Year of the Monkey the enemy again tried to force his way into the artillery base. At one point he penetrated the defense perimeter but pointblank cannon fire again drove him back. A counterattack drove him from the No Than Camp and restored Go-Vap to normalcy.

More than one ARVN officer was killed in this battle, among whom were Lieutenant Colonel To Ngoc Tho of the Fifth Infantry Division and Captain Tran Manh of the Artillery Command. Two 105mm howitzers were destroyed during the fight.

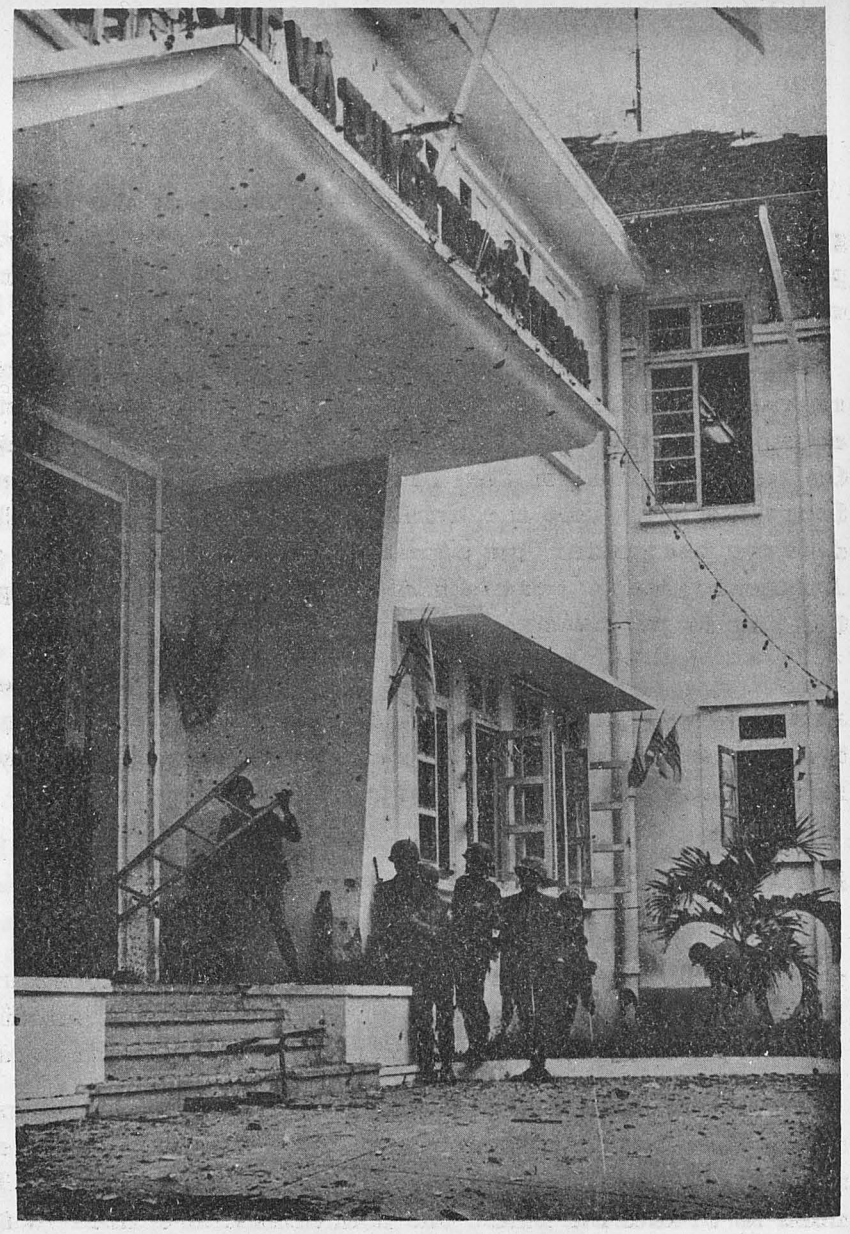
At the radio station

The attack on the Saigon Radio Station took place at about midnight by a group of Viet Cong masquerading as riot police elements. The intruders took control of the government building which had been under the protection of a squad of riot police troops.

After entering the building, the sappers destroyed most machinery but left alone the newly-built wing where most papers and files were stored. Although occupied by the enemy, Radio Saigon continued to broadcast since the transmission center was located in the defense perimeter of the Quang-Trung Training Center which was never threatened by the enemy.

By 0500 hours a group of airborne troops were dispatched to the scene and within two hours disloged the intruders. A total of 14 Viet Cong were killed and some ammunition was captured.

It was learned a few days later that, immediately after the central radio station was occupied by the enemy, the political warfare officer at the Quang-Trung Training Center - only identified as Captain Hung - immediately reported the facts to his commanding officer, Colonel Le Ngoc Trien, and began broadcasting taped music over the air. The following morning listeners of the Voice of Vietnam could still hear VTVN and some short news bulletins as conveyed to



View of the Saigon Radio Station after reoccupation.





the transmission station from headquarters.

The Viet Cong were less successful in their attack on Independence Palace which they tried to infiltrate from the back gate. In this short affair the enemy was able to fire only two B.40 rockets into a sentry post before the defenders reacted strongly,killing four Communists, capturing two, and confiscating five AK.47 automatic rifles as well as a truckful of explosive.

The remaining enemy troops withdrew to a five-storied building on Nguyen Du Street and from there directed their fire on the presidential mansion. It took two days to reduce the Communist threat.

At Headquarters

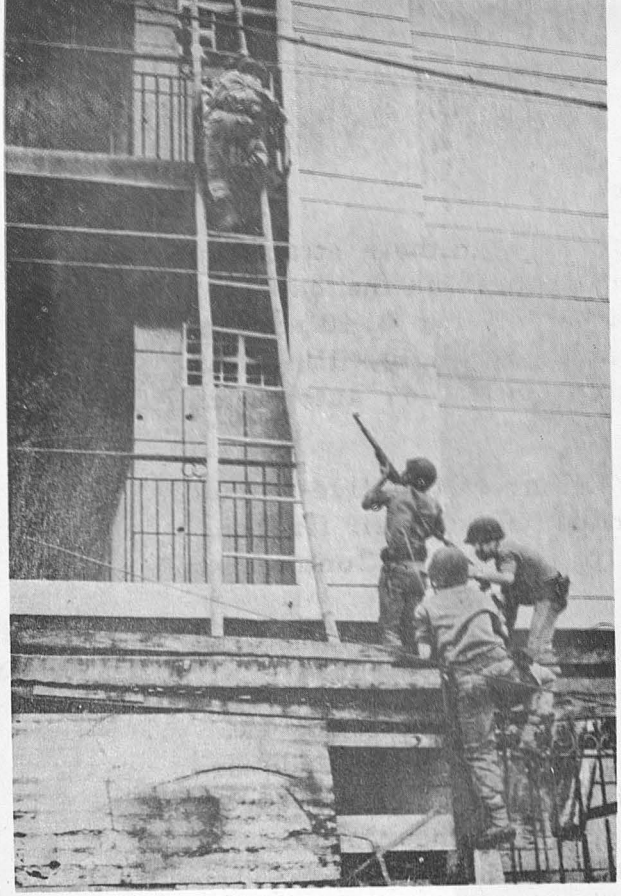
One of the first targets selected by the Viet Cong was Gate Number Five of the South Vietnamese Army general headquarters. Gate Five is used exclusively by high ranking officiers quartered in the compound. At two AM that morning it had just been opened for the car of an unidentified general. It was at this time the enemy tried to assault to gate.

The Communist troops came from Truong Quoc Dung Street on a bus which stopped just outside the gate. Immediately the attackers spread out and assaulted their target. Later reports were to indicate that some of the attackers had arrived on the scene before and taken refuge in the area of Long-Hoa Pagoda.

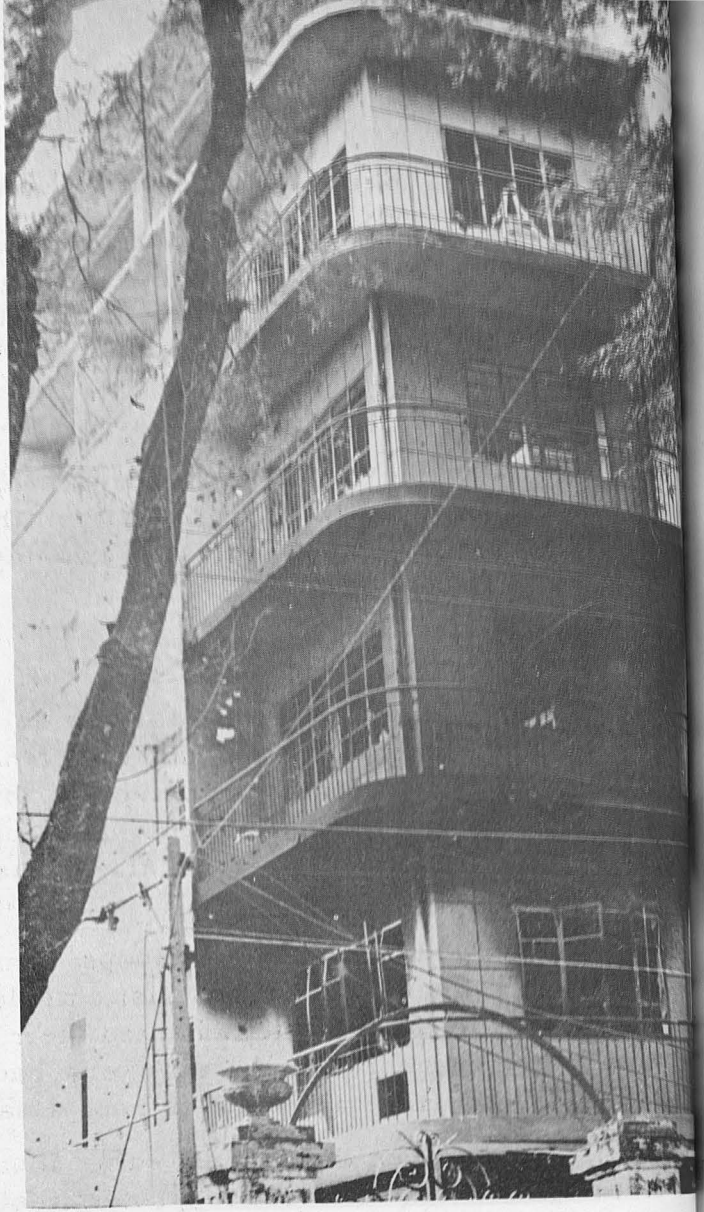
When the assault came about,those remaining behind and on the bus tried their best to protect the attacking troops. Thanks to the speedy reaction of the five military policemen standing guard there - especially Corporal Thao who immediately fired his submachinegun at the assailants - the Viet Cong failed to break in.

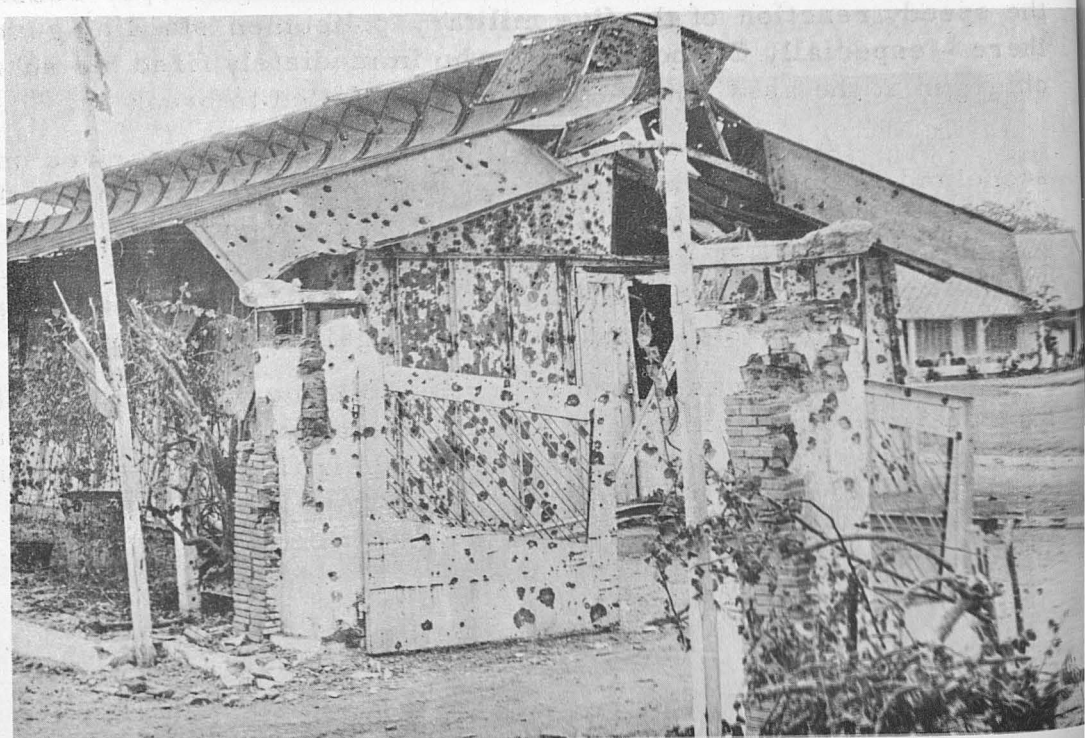
At that moment an American patrol jeep arrived on the scene and seeing what was happening - immediately fired upon the soldiers in civilian clothes,killing three of the Viet Cong. The Communists at Long Hoa Pagoda reacted at once by killing or wounding all the Americans. The Communists again tried to assault the gate from where Corporal Thao continued his gallant resistance.

Thao was helped by a group of American sentries standing guard at the residence of a U.S. general in the vicinity. Witnessing what was taking place,they directed their fire at the Communists,



It took government soldiers quite a few tricks to dislodge the Viet Cong from a multi-storied building on Nguyen Du street from where they had fired on Independence Palace.





What remains of an AG building following the unsuccessful VC attack on the General Headquarters of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

thus reducing the Viet Cong pressure on the gate. While the exchange of fire was continuing, a U.S. truck arrived, bringing replacements for the sentries at the VIP's house. The truck was hit by a B.40 rocket. It caught fire, causing the death or wounding of the Americans of the truck. All these developments helped to keep the intruders from breaking in.

It was to be learned later that the assaulting troops belonged to the F.100 unit which had the mission to get into the headquarters and capture all the high ranking officers. Coordinated attacks had been planned on Gate Four on Vo Di Nguy Street and on Gate Two on Vo Tanh Street. Only Gate One was left alone.

At Gate Four a group of sappers had penetrated the compound of the Armed Forces Language School. But for some unknown reasons they were unable to coordinate their attack with those from the outside. Thus their attack started at 0700 hours, five hours later. At 0705 hours several B.40 rockets were fired at the watchtower which caused it to collapse. All the soldiers standing guard there were killed. An element of the Headquarters Company immediately responded to the enemy threat. However the Commander of the element, Major Tran Le Tai, was slightly wounded in the first minute of the fight and ordered his troops to a line of defense about 200 yards from Gate Four.

The enemy could have used another gate in his attempt to penetrate the Joint General Staff compound, but thanks to the intervention of the American M.P.'s at Gate Four, he did not have enough troops to deploy in the direction of the other gates. Thus the plan for the capture of the South Vietnamese Army headquarters was condemned to failure.

On the morning of the following day Viet Cong troops coming from the Xom Thom area penetrated Gate Four but were unable to communicate with other groups; therefore, they failed to exploit their initial success. Since it was daylight when they broke into the JGS compound, they were again put to a great disadvantage. Still at that time there was only an 80-man company, made up of staff troops supported by a handful of tanks defending the area. If the enemy had known it the situation could have grown serious since there were no reinforcement available.

Outside the compound U.S. troops guarding the VIP's residence and sentries at Gate Five continued firing through the night.

Elements in Long Hoa pagoda returned fire sporadically. They apparently thought the defense of headquarters had been strengthened.

At dawn an MP car went out of camp for a patrol It was able to travel from Gate Number One to Gate Number Five without encountering any enemy fire. Meanwhile the duty officer at JGS, Major Nguyen Dang Chat, received a specific order from Major General Tran Thanh Phong, the Chief of Staff, for the deployment of troops for the defense of this vital installation. However, Major Nguyen Dang Chat was wounded in his attempt to deploy the forces.

At 0900 hours the following morning an airborne element arrived at the headquarters. One knew then that the Communist threat had subsided. When the shooting started at Gate Number Five, practically no one at JGS thought it was a Viet Cong attack. It was fortunate the Communists did not succeed in penetrating the compound at the first try for such a development would have consequences impossible to predict.

Meanwhile during that night a two battalion force of Viet Cong penetrated Hoc Mon from the north. At 0300 hours the intruders began their attack on Chau Van Tiep camp after setting fire to a nearby school and village administration office.

The sentry, it was later learned, did not think they were Viet Cong but he fired a warning shot into the air. The lone shot triggered a volley of bullets from the assailants. That was the beginning of the end for the intruders for a newly installed machinegun immediately spit fire in their direction. Unable to resist, the Communists spread along the moat line outside the camp but, unfortunately for them, the machinegun was set up to fire in that direction too. A total of 40 Viet Cong died in that contact while six of them were captured. The garrison troops captured over 30 weapons of all kinds. The defenders casualties were two killed and five wounded.

The following morning troops of the Quang Trung Training Center undertook to mop up the neighboring area and the soldiers again killed a number of Viet Cong.

As a rule each guard post consists of six soldiers but, warned by headquarters of an impending enemy attack, each post was reinforced before midnight with three additional soldiers and a machinegun. These reinforced guard posts caused the Viet Cong defeat but probably another factor was the V.C. inaccurate assessment of our forces.

Fighting in the suburbs

The Viet Cong Tet offensive, which was launched against 28 provincial cities and important military installations with an estimated 97 battalions of troops,included both combat and support troops. The offensive failed rapidly except in the former imperial capital of Hue where,due to cloudy weather and the resulting poor observation,the Communists were able to fight nearly a month.

In other parts of the country the intruders were expelled from the cities but were apparently unable to see the true situation. Thus, they were to mount a second wave offensive on 17February. This took place in quite a few locations but was rather short in duration and less intensive than the initial phase. Although having the capability of bringing troops to the outlying areas of various cities, the enemy did not have the will and the ability to turn these movements into victories.

Most remarkable was his ability to continue pounding population centers with mortar and rockets of all calibers. He also made use of a new rocket manufactured in Russia, the 122mm rocket, that has a range of eight miles and has an explosive power equivalent to 46 kilos of TNT.

In Saigon the enemy began this new offensive phase with a shelling of the Tan Son Nhut Airport. The bombardment began at 0120 hours and, besides the sprawling air base, Communist warheads also fell on the MACV Headquarters, the National Police Headquarters, and the Phu Lam Radar Station. A total of nearly 100 rounds of 82mm mortar and 37 rounds of 122mm rockets exploded in the air base.

One of these warheads hit the waiting room where 88 U. S. Navymen of the Riverine Force were waiting to return to the U. S., killing six of the homegoing troops and wounding quite a few others. Six other rounds hit the headquarters of General William C. Westmoreland but there were no casualties. One C. 47 transport plane of the VNAF 33rd Air Wing was destroyed and another damaged while five U. S. planes were either destroyed or damaged. The attack resulted in a total of seven dead and 131 wounded, of which 67 were evacuated.

At Police Headquarters five policemen lost their lives and another 40 were wounded when the enemy lodged some 20 rounds of 82mm mortar into the compound. This general area was to be attacked anew the following day but all the warheads fell into a poor

section behind the Inspectorate General of Labor which is usually referred to as the Indian Buddha Section.

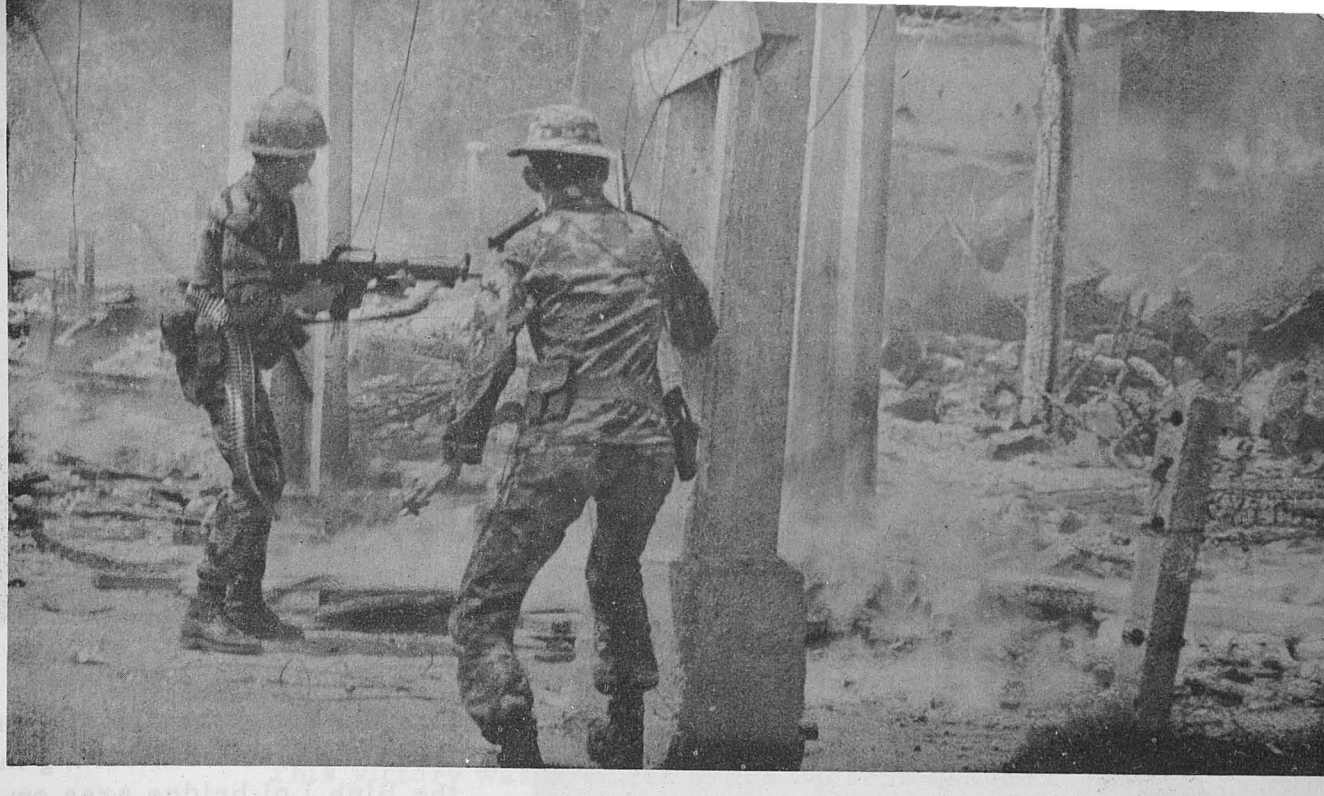
In addition to these aerial attacks in the dark hours of February 17, the enemy also mounted a ground action to destroy the Binh Loi and Highway bridges, but his troops were repelled the following day by South Vietnamese Marines dispatched to bar them from penetrating the city. They also launched an attack on the road from Hoc Mon to Xom Moi, which was under the tactical responsibility of the Second Airborne Task Force and included such important installations as the Tan Son Nhut Air Base, the Vinatexco Company, the Quang Trung Training Center, and others.

Throughout the night the VC Quyet Thang Battalion, an element of the Phu Loi Regiment, clashed with the Eighth Airborne Battalion in an area northwest of Tan Thoi Hiep. The fighting started a little past midnight, beginning with many mortar barrages and following with a ground assault that included B.40 and B.41 fired point-blank against the defense perimeter of the airborne position.

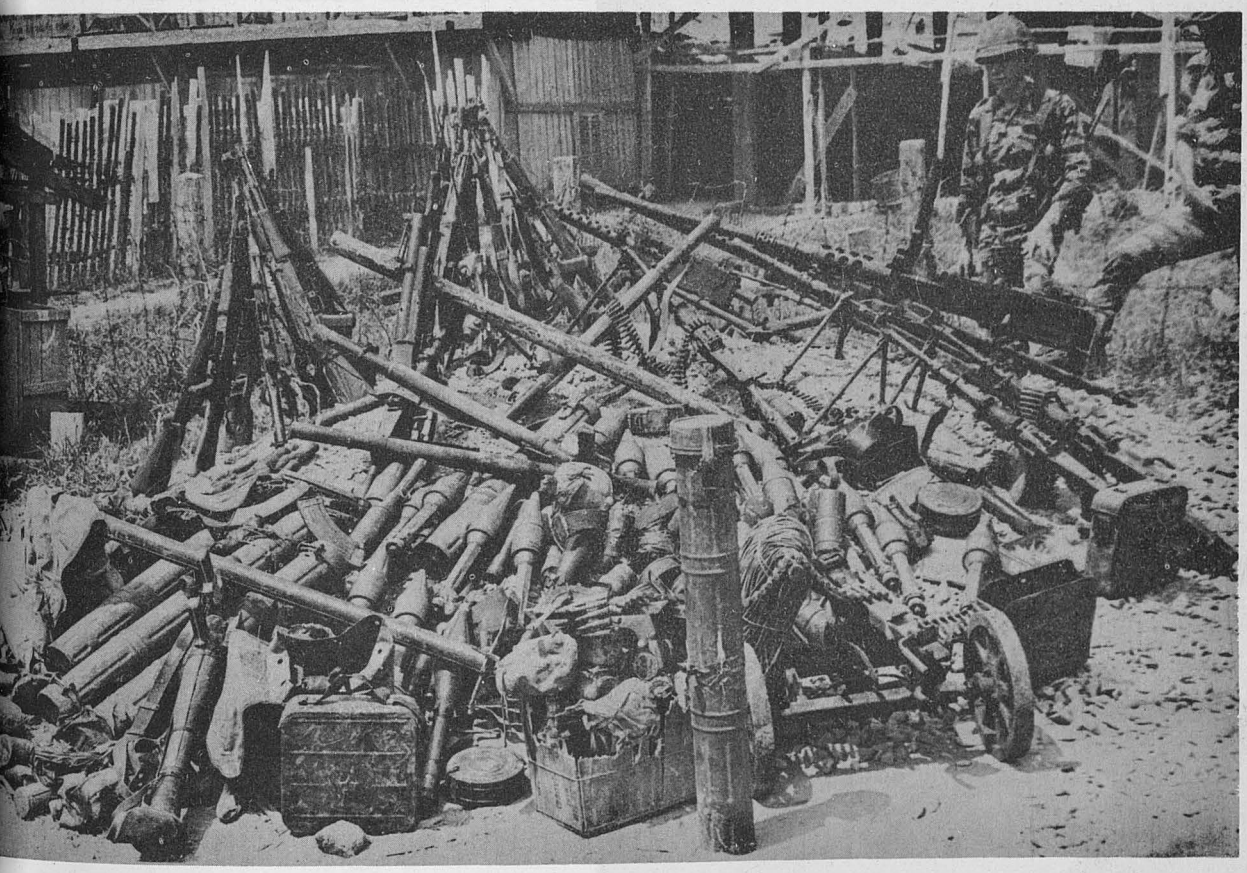
While the paratroopers were successfully resisting all attempts to overrun their position, they also discovered some VC artillery positions firing in the direction of the Tan Son Nhut Airport. These positions were a bare 200 yards from the Airborne command post and were soon destroyed by airpower called to attack them.

The Communists continued their assault but, with some armored reinforcements and flares illuminating the sky, the defenders kept them at bay and were in full control of the situation at dawn. The battle resulted in 78 Communist dead, one taken prisoner, and arms and ammunition captured to include one 60mm mortar tube, two Czech machineguns, 13 B.40 and two B.41 individual rocket launchers, 13 AK.47 automatic rifles, one Carbine, one colt, and one submachine-gun. On the government side, seven soldiers were killed, 35 wounded and an armored vehicle damaged.

The following night (19 February), the Communists attacked the area of Phu Lam using two Main Force battalions in the hope of destroying a government Ranger battalion and continuing their march into the city. The two enemy battalions were the First and Sixth Battalions, with the first unit frontally assaulting the government position while the second battalion served as reinforcements. Nam Xuan and Tu Vu, respectively commander and deputy commander of one of the battalions, had been killed in a previous attack on the city along with their staff.



Marines operating in the vicinity of Binh Loi bridge on the 18 of Feb. 1968



Trophy taken by Marines during the battle near Binh Loi bridge (18 Feb. 1968)



Marines from the 3rd Marine Battalion counterattacking in the Binh Loi bridge area on 18 February 1968.



Civilians also join in the fight.

At 0215 hours, the insurgents resorted to an intense mortar barrage to give additional punch to their frontal thrust. Mortar rounds and B.40 rockets continuously pounded the command post of the government battalion but due to the positions fortifications, no casualties were recorded. Ten minutes later their ground troops began the real attack.

They did not reckon with the presence of a reconnaissance squad lying out of camp ready to "welcome" them. As soon as the enemy showed themselves,they were cut down. The whole attacking force was mowed down by machinegun fire.Following this a total of 40 dead VC bodies were counted,including that of a man named Muoi,the Deputy Commanding Officer of the First Battalion. Government soldiers also took six B.40 rocket launchers, two machineguns, two mortar tubes, 36 AK.47 automatic rifles, 20 pounds of TNT, and about a ton of ammunition.

This victory was credited to the reconnaissance squad which initially had the simple task of alerting the main body of troops of the Viet Cong attack. These reconnaissance troopers struck the enemy a deadly blow at the initial minute of the encounter. The insurgents never had the chance of doing anything before they were decimated. The extent of their failure can be measured by their inability to even take away the bodies of their dead, that of their Deputy Commander included.

Another truism also has begun to slowly emerge from this battle. The Viet Cong battalion's inability to even approach the command post of the Ranger unit can be traced to their very poor morale. Indeed, following the incredibly high losses recorded by this unit in the first wave of attacks,it had to fill up its depleted ranks with youths forcefully drafted. These constituted the majority. According to a prisoner of war he had only two weeks of training before being assigned to his unit and sent to war.

A little past noon on 2 February a mechanized infantry element of the U.S. Army clashed with the Viet Cong just over one mile out of Hoc Mon and about ten miles northwest of Saigon. The encounter lasted until early evening. At about the same time,government marines sweeping through the Binh Hoa intersection area and the Hang Xanh section also inflicted some losses on the enemy.

During the night fighting again flared up in the Tan Son Nhut area. The enemy apparently had received some reinforcements and intensified his pressure just north of the Quang Trung Training

Center. Communist soldiers also made their presence felt in Thu Duc, blowing up a watchtower guarding the bridge of Go Dua just a mile from Thu Duc and destroying the bridge with TNT.

The following day enemy pressure in the Thu Duc area became more intense as his gunners mortared an equipment company installation and occupied the Sicovina textile factory there. A battle was also reported in the general area two miles northwest of the race track. The heavy fighting in this area was joined by planes and artillery from the friendly side and anti-aircraft machineguns from the Communist side. The Communists did their best to protect this infiltration route from where they had sent hundreds of mortar rounds into Saigon during the preceding days.

The battle started at the Cemetery of the Trieu Chau (Chinese) Congregation when the 33rd Ranger Battalion came to relieve an American unit. This move followed the decision to merge Zones "D" and "F" and make both divisions the area of responsibility of government Rangers. The enemy had avoided contact with the Americans but when South Vietnamese troops arrived the Communists immediately struck.

A Vietnam press correspondent was with the Rangers when fighting broke out between the Viet Cong and the crack government unit,which then was under the command of Captain Nguyen Thiet. The correspondent was marching with the Third Company and its commander, young Lieutenant Trinh Thanh Xuan. Here is his description of the battle.:

"Binh Thoi Firing Range, 20-2-68(VP). -- It was a little past noon when Lieutenant Trinh Thanh Xuan got ready for lunch. At that precise moment however, the youthful leader of the Third Company, 33rd Ranger Battalion, got word from his commanding officer that the enemy was about to strike.

"The enemy has infiltrated many troops in the Trieu Chau Congregation Cemetery which is 200 yards from the Binh Thoi Firing Range. His troops also were most numerous in a triangle made up of Tan Hoa, Cau Tre, and Phu Binh. This situation had the immediate effect of spoiling Lt. Xuan's lunch.

"After acknowledging the order to move against the enemy,the company divided itself into three parts : 1st platoon under Sergeant Tran Xoong, a veteran with over 30 years of service, was assigned the task of hitting the enemy from the right flank; 3rd platoon,

under Sergeant Tang Ly, was given the task of protecting the command element and attacking the enemy from the left flank; and 2nd platoon, under Warrant Officer UT, was to hit the enemy in a frontal attack in coordination with the crack reconnaissance section.

"The waiting period did not last long. As soon as the Rangers left Village Road 14 and were in view from the cemetery, the Communists opened fire on them. Tran Xoong's troops who were in an open field did not have any alternative but to hit back as forcefully as possible. They charged with fixed bayonets. The first Viet Cong defense line rapidly collapsed.

"Xoong and his troops immediately surged forward and, after taking possession of the enemy trenches, continued to direct their fire at the Communists who then were behind every tomb in the big cemetery. The opposing troops were so close to one another that they could see one another's face. The Viet Cong were a curious mixture of black and white clad elements with some of them half naked.

"Immediately at the start of the battle it became evident the Viet Cong were Main Force troops well equipped with such weapons as B.40 rocket launchers and other collective arms. Their individual weapons were mostly AK.50's, which are newer and better version of the AK.47. All this firepower did not prevent the Rangers from surging ahead once more and occupying a small vermicelli factory.

"But here the troops under the command of Lieutenant Xuan were to meet with strong enemy resistance. The Viet Cong had two heavy machineguns which were silenced by a series of M.79 grenades personally launched by the company commander. (The M.79 is a large egg-shaped grenade with an incomparable destructive power).

"In spite of intense pounding of their position, the VC machinegunners refused to budge, creating the feeling among the Rangers they had been chained to their arms. Meanwhile a bare 20 yards separated the gunners on both sides as they continued to fire at each other.

"Seeing red at what he called Viet Cong stubbornness, Private Tran Dac Hiep of the reconnaissance section, without regard for his personal safety, took over the M.79 launcher and directed it at the Viet Cong position in a house. In the other position in a house, a Viet Cong saw Hiep and, with an AK.50, tried to stop him. Both fired at the same time and both collapsed simultaneously. Hiep was killed by a bullet that went through his helmet and the Viet Cong was slain along with his machinegunner friends.

"Lieutenant Xuan had had only time to tell Hiep to be careful when the young soldier was mortally wounded. He immediately tried to retrieve the body of the young hero but enemy gunners had followed his movements carefully and he could not get anywhere near Hiep.

"In the face of the Lieutenant's dilemma a civilian in his forties, who along with an old lady had been caught in the fight, volunteered to recover Hiep's body. The man, Mr. Ho Van Hai, told the soldiers, "Let me do it. Since I am in civilian clothes it might be a little easier".

"And without waiting for an answer, Mr. Hai went out into the open, trying in the meanwhile to **light a Bastos cigarette to calm** his nerves. He trod slowly amidst explosions, reached Hiep, and pulled the lifeless body back to the safety of the command post.

"Meanwhile on the left hand flank Captain Thiet was speaking on the radio, ordering Lieutenant Xuan to withdraw his troops so that an armored element could finish the job. Three tanks, nicknamed "Crabs", appeared from nowhere, causing the enemy to reoganize his frontline within sight of the government soldiers.

"The "Crabs" surged forward slowly but surely. A flurry of bombs from enemy rocket launchers flew in the direction of the moving vehicles, reducing one of them to a burning heap of metal. This did not stop the Rangers from continuing the assault. Captain Thiet and his soldiers mounted the "Crab" and converted the vehicle into a huge fire machine.

"Fighting grew more intense with each passing minute. The second tank arrived as reinforcement only to be hit by a flying bomb and set afire. Enemy troops immediately took advantage of the surprise to start a counterattack. But they did not realize the resourcefulness of the commander of the 33rd Ranger Battalion and his men.

"At a simple order a totally different formation emerged from the confused battle scene with masked men, moving around like supernatural beings, felling horrified Viet Cong by the dozens. Most Rangers had been equipped with gas masks and they had resorted to this tactic to defeat an enemy determined to overrun them by sheer numbers.

"In this engagement Viet Cong losses reached unimaginable proportions.

"By then with only a wall separating the two opposing sides, the group of government tanks pounded the Viet Cong line so vigorously that the Communists died by the dozens. By 1420 hours, jets and helicopter gunships also joined in the battle. It was two hours since the battle began and turned the area into an exploding inferno.

"Troops on both sides were intermingled in a free for all that grew in intensity with each passing minute. One of the helicopters was hit as it tried to support the ground troops more effectively. An immediate order was issued to prevent the enemy from approaching the downed aircraft.

"By 1600 hours the fight grew into a hand-to-hand affair, with troops on both sides trying to dislodge the others from tomb after tomb. Two hours later as night was approaching, another group of planes arrived to pound the target while the Rangers consolidated their positions for the night. The day's fighting had resulted in 211 Viet Cong dead, among whom at least 20 were women.

"The following morning (21 Feb) the Rangers received the order to pin the enemy down and let jets and artillery finish the job. After an intense pounding of the Communist positions, the Rangers again were on the move but it took them over an hour to cross 300 yards of spinach field before assaulting the buildings close to the enemy lines.

"From these buildings they had to use M. 72 rockets and 57mm recoiless rifles to break through and engage the enemy. By mid-morning jets and artillery again were called in, creating a battle scene better than the best war movies and prompting the incorrigible Vietnamese civilians to climb the roofs of their houses and watch the fight from there.

"From these positions many civilians told the Rangers where the retreating enemy troops had gone. And so, after a two-hour air raid, practically all the Rangers of the 33rd Ranger Battalion were in positions from which they could attack the enemy troops who had dug themselves in at the cemetery. Here and there newly dug tombs could be seen with their contents of AK. 47 rifles scattered about.

"Aspirant Thach could be seen on a burnt out M. 113, whose half burnt body still showed the man in a firing position. Next to Thach was Vo Dinh Chi, the driver. Both had made the supreme sacrifice after running over many enemy positions armed with the deadly B. 40 individual rocket launchers.

"All over the place Viet Cong bodies could be seen, making the task of this reporter practically impossible. Domestic animals killed in the fight also created an unforgettable picture with hogs as big as cows littering the area and a lone and wounded cow crying while standing fast.

"Many tombs had been opened by the violence of air raids, yielding skeletons of those dead years ago. For them death had arrived twice. But all these horrors did not stop the Rangers who continued the sweep until early afternoon.

"The battle had raged for over 24 hours. From one of the tombs still intact, Lieutenant Trinh Thanh Xuan, Commander of the Third Company, reported :

"In this battle we have captured many masks with which the Viet Cong apparently had intended to fight a gas war. These masks look rather strange as they are made of nylon with green oxygen tubes. The total Viet Cong losses amount to about 300, of which some are buried under collapsed buildings.

The enemy continued to try to enter the city from its northwestern gates. Most indicative of this intention was a battle opposing a battalion of Regiment 272/CT. 9 and the Third Brigade of the US 25th Infantry Division. The battle took place on 21 February at the Village of Vinh Loc district of Tan Binh, a mere four miles northwest of Saigon.

After this battle enemy pressure continued to be maintained in that area, especially in the second half of February when elements of the crack Viet Cong Ninth Infantry Division made their appearance in the region of Hoc Mon. In addition to their presence one also has to reckon with their determination to redeem themselves with something better than the series of beating they had recorded in the preceding months.

In their attempt to infiltrate Saigon, the Ninth Division had one of its regiments, the 272nd, mauled by US troops with 132 dead by body count. Another regiment, the 273rd, tried to come in through Go Vap but was stopped by Vietnamese airborne troops. Its third regiment, the 271st, was in better shape, since it was kept in Hoc Mon to be used as reinforcements for the other two regiments.

To cope with this situation the two Allied commands had to maintain quite a few troops in the Capital Military District. On the Vietnamese side there were two airborne task forces, a Marine task

force, a Ranger group and many newly created units formed with cadets and staff members of the many military agencies in Saigon. On the American side there were two US brigades operating in the suburbs, under the command of Major General Keith L. Ware. Both commands ordered a rapid improvement of the defense of the many military installations in the capital.

During the night of 22 February a clash was reported between government troops and an unidentified Viet Cong unit in the POL depot of Go Vap, resulting in a speedy defeat of the enemy. The following day the situation in Saigon's many suburbs was described by Allied spokesmen as "calm". But in the early hours of 24 February, more exactly at 0440 hours, Communist gunners again pounded the Tan Son Nhut Air Base and Saigon's northern outskirts.

A total of some 20 rounds of 82mm mortar and 122 mm rockets fell in two volleys on the sprawling air base, killing three soldiers and wounding another 17. The bombardment also resulted in damage to three aircraft. A lone warhead fell on the Vietnamese Joint General Staff compound, wounding two servicemen, and another warhead hit a civilian house in the Lang Cha Ca area just outside Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

In this last instance the house was completely destroyed and an entire family of 11 killed.

It was learned later that the enemy had shelled the air base and neighboring installations from other cemeteries in an area south of the air base.

Following his failure against the Go Vap POL installation, the enemy tried his luck once more during the night of 24-25 February. His ground attack was preceded by an intense mortar and rocket barrage, but it too failed.

Within the city the enemy was only strong enough to initiate a few sabotage actions, mainly terrorist activities. His troops blew up two bridges : one on the Giong Ong To River about five miles south of Thu Duc and the other on the Cau Kinh River, a bare two miles northeast of Gia Dinh City.

During the mortaring of the capital, enemy gunners mortared many populated areas such as the Nguyen Van Thanh Quay where 40 houses were destroyed and three civilians killed, the Tu Do Resettlement Center in Cholon, and the CMD Command. His troops also

engaged in other harrassing actions such as the ones recorded against the Newport and the bus station in Gia Dinh.

On the morning of 24 February a combined US-Vietnamese force, supported by armor and air strikes, swept through an area 11 miles from Saigon in search of a Communist element known to be operating in the villages of Xuan Thoi Son, Xuan Thoi Thuong and Xuan Thoi Trung. A heavy clash ensued at Tan Thoi Trung, between a South Vietnamese airborne element and the Viet Cong, that continued into early evening.

In this clash the ground troops were supported most effectively by gunships and artillery and, as the fighting slowed at dark, a total of 20 Communists had been killed, five captured, and 10 individual weapons confiscated. The enemy force was about 400 strong and well equipped with anti-aircraft machineguns that shot an Allied helicotper out of the sky. This fortunately resulted in no casualties among the passengers.

In another operation in this general area three miles northeast of Saigon, an airborne battalion (-) with only two companies met with the enemy in one of the fiercest battles of the campaign. The Sixth Airborne Battalion, including only Companies 61 and 64, met and fought an element of the Phu Loi Three Battalion for six hours. In the course of the battle government troops killed 72 Viet Cong.

After securing control of the area, the government soldiers captured two machineguns, ten AK. 47 individual weapons and two Chinese Communist pistols. Against a loss of 72 killed on the Communist side, the South Vietnamese unit lost five dead and seven wounded. Among the Viet Cong killed was Dinh Huu Chinh, who had commanded Company B2/A7, and his political commissar, Tran Van Ngu.

Also beginning that first day of March, Allied troops in the Saigon area launched a series of operations that sought to break the Communist noose around the city. In the area of the Binh Loi bridge, one such operation was launched that is typical of many other like campaigns.

To reduce enemy pressure in this area, a combined operation grouping thousands of Allied soldiers was conducted, with the objective of killing as many Viet Cong as possible. The operation took place in a triangle made up of the district towns of Thu Duc, Lai Thieu and Di An. Here the enemy maintained important installations in the Dong An Woods, the Forest of Dau, the Lo Chen Area, Thuan Giao, and the Co Mi Woods.

Outside this triangle an important task force of South Vietnamese Marines, Rangers and infantrymen, supported by armor and PBR elements, were given the task of blocking the retreat of an estimated 4,000 communists, including Main Force and regional force troops who had failed in two attempts against the city.

However, this big operation failed to bring about any of the contemplated results. The enemy avoided battle and scattered action was reported resulting in light casualties on the Communist side.

On the second day of March the Tan Son Nhut Air Base was rocketed for the third time. This time enemy gunners shelled the important installation until 0900 hours. Although only light casualties and insignificant material losses were recorded, the attack was more intense than on previous occasions. Warheads also fell on populated areas in Cholon.

On 7 March airborne troops, operating in the Ba Diem and Tan Thoi Trung areas, again reported an important clash with the enemy. The battle raged for three hours. The government force was supported by four jets which took turns strafing Viet Cong positions. Following this battle, the situation in the Capital Military District returned to normal.

Losses on both sides during the months of February and March in the Saigon area were as follows :

A total of 323 government soldiers lost their lives, 907 were wounded and 28 weapons, including five crew-served, were lost. On the enemy side a total of 5,289 soldiers and cadres were killed, 415 were taken prisoners, and 1,934 weapons were confiscated, including 1,544 individual and 390 crew served weapons.

These figures were taken from statistics released by the Joint General Staff for the months of February and March 1968.

The intense fighting, which the people of Saigon have witnessed since the early days of the Year of the Monkey, had the effect of drastically changing the atmosphere in this war capital. Instead of the fun they were so prone to having, the people of Saigon began living austerely. The war was on their doorstep.

Little traffic was seen in the streets; the citizens travelled directly to their work with little other movement. Night life came to a complete standstill. All restaurants and places of entertainment closed their doors. Even schools were closed until 1 April.

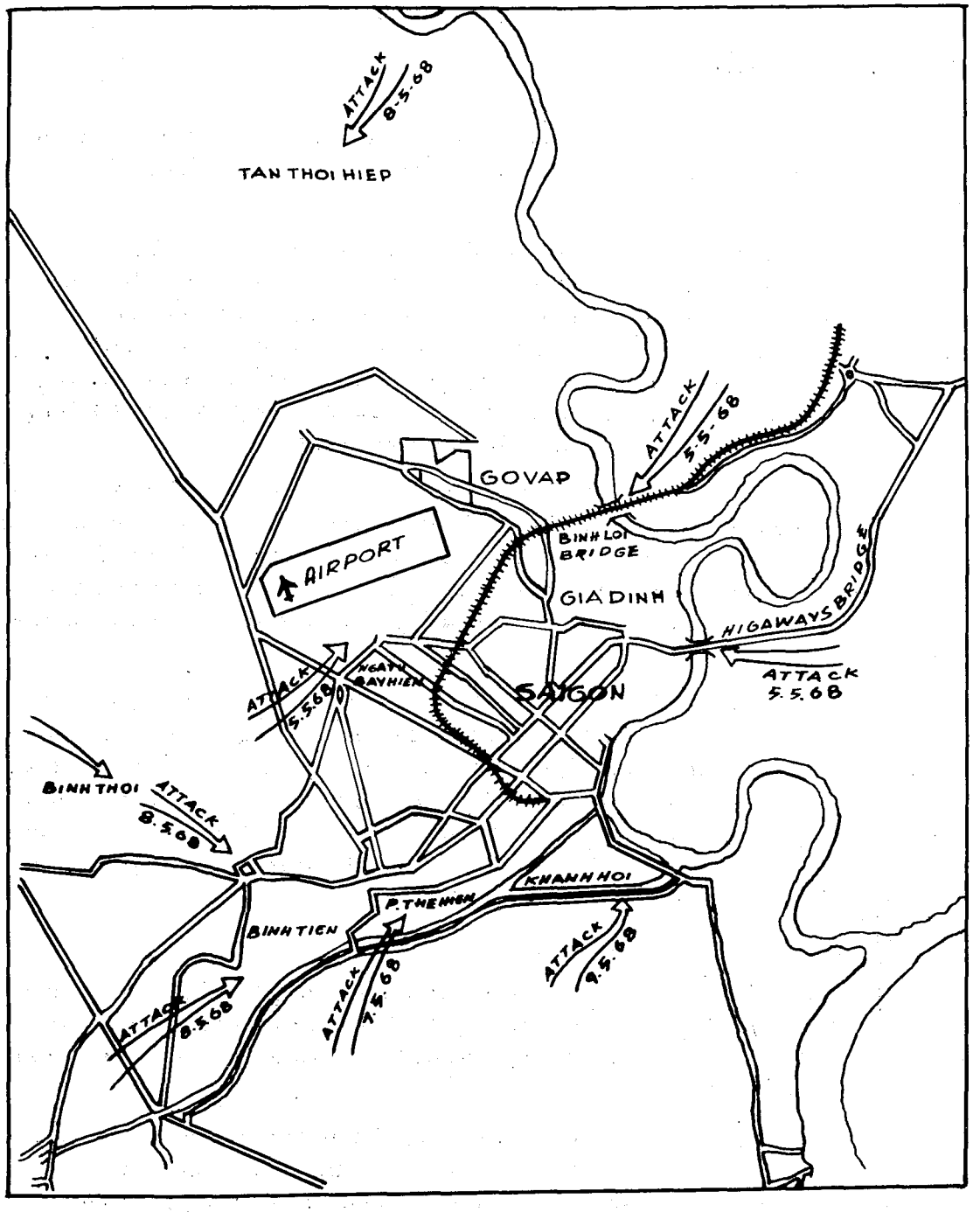
The cost of living also rose dramatically. A bowl of soup, that prior to Tet cost only VN$30, could only be found at 40 piastres. A few stem of spinach doubled in price to VN$15 and people had to pay 900 piastres for a kilo of pork. The price of rice remained steady.

Business ground to a halt because inland communications had become difficult and the people were less willing to spend money, except on food. This trend however, had been noticeable for sometime before the New Year. Psychologically, business circles here also suffered and no expansion of any kind was reported.

But following the unprecedented Viet Cong attack, President Nguyen Van Thieu's prestige recorded a dramatic upturn. Many political groups that thus far had opposed the government chose to support it in the difficult days of the nation's history. Moreover many hard measures had been taken by the government without encountering any opposition.

Most indicative of this were the enactment of the General Mobilization Law, the recall of reserves, the creation of the Popular Self Defense Corps and the drafting of students. This absence of opposition can be traced to the Viet Cong offensive, which showed the Communists in their true light: a group of bad soldiers, killers and arsonists, who died by the hundreds, taking to their heels in the face of determined resistance.

2nd PHASE OF V. C. OFFENSIVE AGAINST SAIGON
(From 5 May to 12 may 1968)



Durations of the battles :

- Battle at Thi-Nghe from 5 May 68 to 7 May 68
- Battle at Binh Loi Bridge from 5 May 68 to 5 May 68
- Battle at Bay Hien Intersection from 6 May 68 to 7 May 68
- Battle at Binh Thoi – Minh Phung from 5 May 68 to 12 May 68
- Battle at Binh Tien from 8 May 68 to 9 May 68
- Battle at Tan-Thoi-Hiep from 8 May 68 to 11 May 68
- Battle at Y Bridge from 9 May 68 to 12 May 68

2nd phase battles

The 2nd Phase of the Communist Offensive can be divided into two periods, the first from 5 to 12 May and second from 25 May to 16 June 1968.

Unlike the initial phase,Communist troops during the second phase did not seek to attack any of the military installations and nerve centers in Saigon but simply tried to penetrate populated areas to create as much destruction as possible. The tactics employed by the enemy can be called one of city guerrilla warfare, since they simply dug themselves in while trying to keep the fight on for as long as possible,thus creating as much damage as possible.

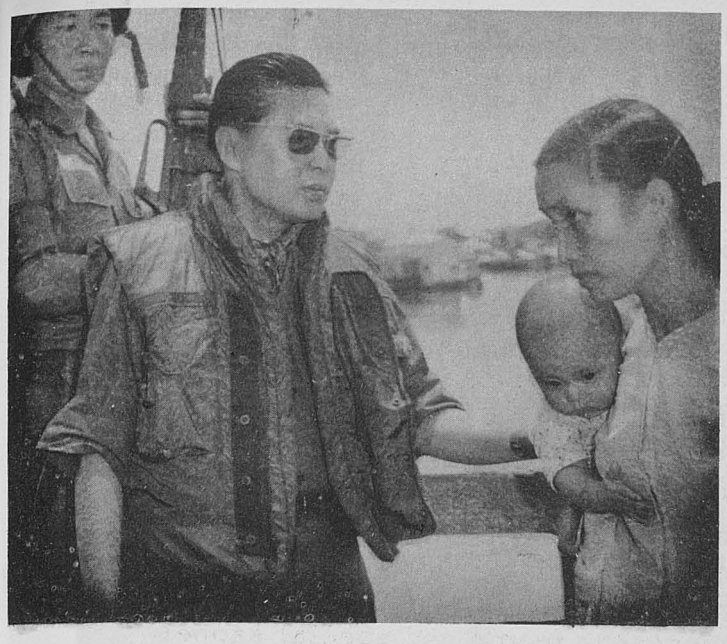
The first period of this phase of offensive ended speedily, for the Allies readily accepted the risk of destruction of civilian homes. Although expelled from the city the enemy soon returned. His efforts were successful because of the great extent of the front line and the tiredness of the defenders,who had been fighting for many weeks without any respite.

The second period was to last longer,for enemy troops by then had acquired some experience in the street fighting. During this period,although the enemy succeeded in bringing about the destruction of thousands of houses,he lost two full regiments of troops either through fighting or surrender. Most noticeable in this period was the mass surrender of over one hundred hardcore enemy, a phenomenon that proved the low morale of the enemy.

FIRST PERIOD

5 May 1968. The attacks on Saigon began with a mortar and rocket barrage a little past midnight. The Communist warheads fell on many areas of the sprawling capital and its suburbs. These can be broken down as follows :

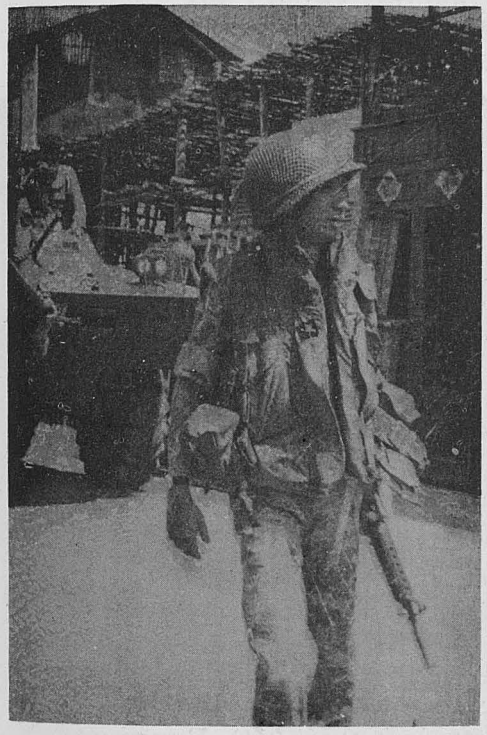
Many rockets fell on Tan Son Nhut Airport but resulted in no extensive damage. One round fell near the residence of U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. Another round impacted near the Central Market. Still another destroyed a power transformer facing the Phuoc Thien Hospital and a building nearby on Nguyen Trai Street. Eleven others scattered on Tu Do, Thong Nhut, Hoang Dieu, Huynh Thuc Khang and Ngo Duc Ke Streets.



Premier Nguyen Van Loc is shown here inspecting a battle area near the 'Y' bridge.



MG Tran Thanh Phong inspects the troops in Gia Dinh (25 May 1968)



BG Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Police Director General, before he was wounded in trying to assault a VC position near the radio station.



Saigon Mayor Colonel Van Van Cua in Cholon just before he was wounded on 3 June 1968.

Following this aerial attack,enemy ground troops attacked a South Vietnamese Marine element standing guard on the Bien-Hoa Highways, the Binh Loi and Xa Lo bridges,as well as another bridge much nearer to Saigon. They also assaulted the Cau Tre Police Station in the Binh Loi area. All these attacks took place between 0030 hours and 0500 hours but were not successful.

However, the enemy had penetrated many populated areas in Thi Nghe, a section of the Dakao district in Saigon, and the Binh Thoi ward in Cholon,through such attacks.

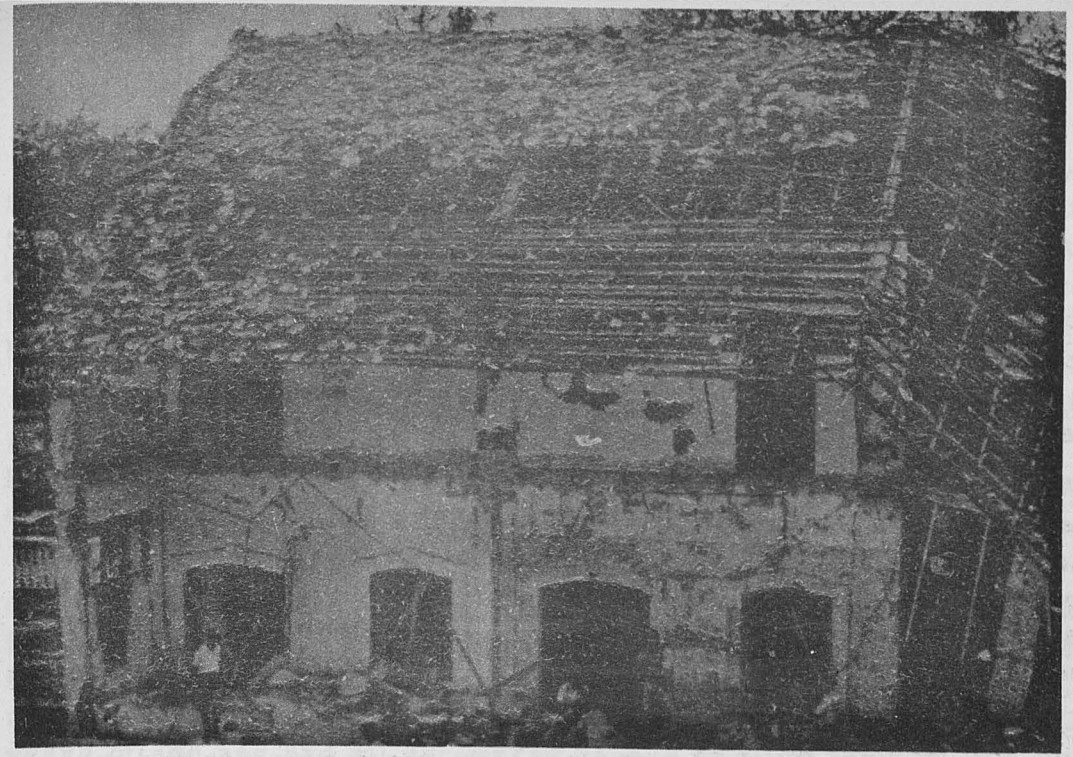
Meanwhile, at dusk many Communist elements within the city began harassing the forces of order and took to the street trying to sell their cause through loudspeakers. This task apparently was given Viet Cong armed propaganda teams and special sapper troops who made their appearances in various parts of the city, especially on Pho Co Dieu, Nguyen Trau, Tran Quy, Phan Van Tri, Co Giang, De Tham, Nguyen Thien Thuat, Cao Dat, and Tran Binh Trong Streets.

These groups started distributing leaflets while speaking to the people through loudspeakers. Most leaflets were supposed to have been originated from the so called Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces (ANDPF). Police reported later that a total of twelve different leaflets were distributed in Saigon.

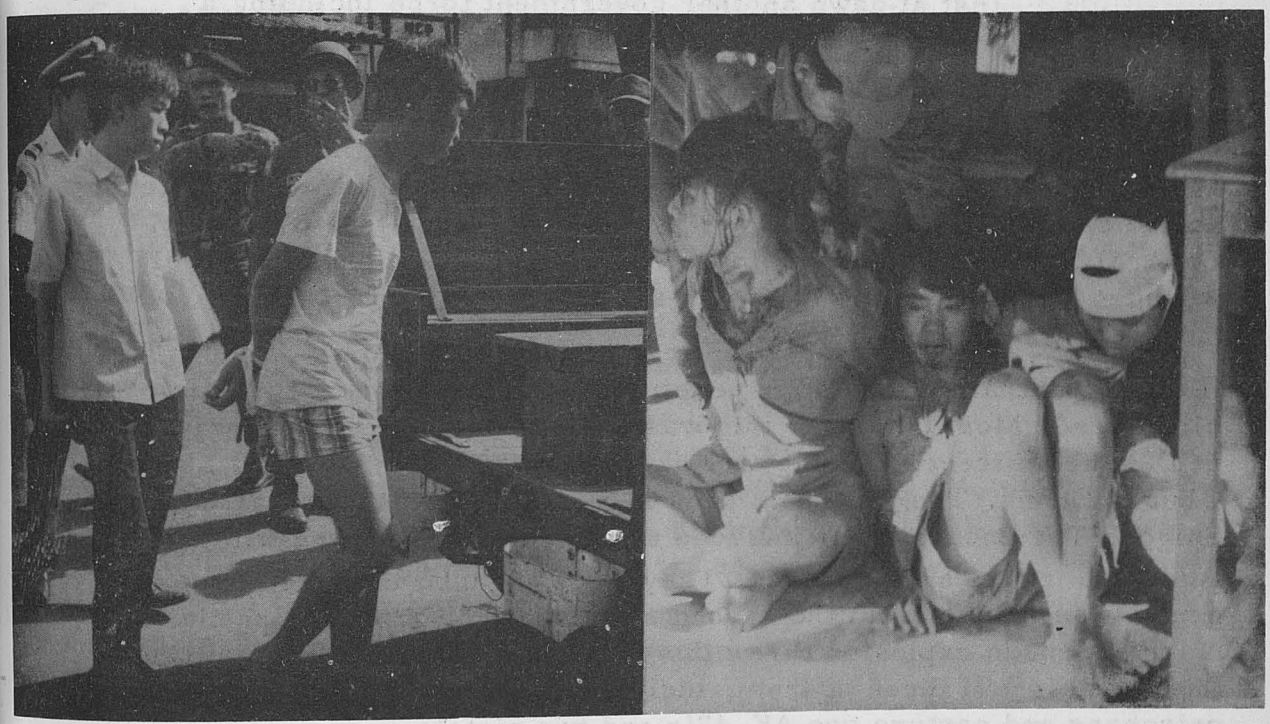
These Viet Cong documents did not differ from one another very much. They were,on the whole, calls to revolt and encouragement for insurgent acts by the local troops and population. Most remarkable of these was a document intended for political cadres entitled "The Nine Policies in Newly Liberated Cities".

The first three commands dealt with the confiscation of the people's property. The six following commands were promises to, as they called them,"repentant" civilian and military personnel, and civil servants. Besides, having learned a lesson during their unsuccessful Tet offensive, the Communist High Command instructed its cadre to make full use of the military and civilian proselyting tactics in an effort to win over some of the GVN troops and cadre.

In addition,the Communists attempted to penetrate the police station of the Eighth Precinct. Unable to make a penetration, they entered the unguarded administrative office of the Fifth Precinct, raised their flag, and set fire to some documents.



The explosion of a youth center near the Television House is viewed by many observers as marking the start of the May offensive. The photo above shows the center following the explosion that afternoon. (3 May 1968)



In the early hours of 5 May 1968, the Communists began a second wave of offensive on Saigon. VC sapper troops were to take a major part in this attack. But on that very day many were those arrested or taken prisoners by government forces.

Early in the morning of 5 May a counterattack was ordered with thousands of government troops trying to eliminate Viet Cong pockets and prevent other communist units from entering the city. A Ranger element was dispatched to the Binh Thoi area but as it reached Phu Binh it came under attack by an unknown enemy force.

Since the enemy did his best to stick to populated areas and since quite a few innocent civilians were in the battle zone, an all day fight ensued without the Rangers being able to dislodge the intruders. It was in this area that a tragedy happened to four journalists who simply committed the mistake of trying to do their duties properly.

It was about 0900 hours when a jeepload of foreign journalists traveling on Road 52 was stopped by the insurgents and murdered. Among those who lost their lives on that day were Ronald B. Laramy and Bruce S. Pigott of Reuters, Michael Y. Birch of the Australian Associated Press and John L. Cantwell of Time Magazine. Another victim of Viet Cong atrocity was Count Hasso Von Kollenberg of the German Embassy, who also was killed on this front.

Just at dawn another government force including a Marine element and some riot police was dispatched to the Thi Nghe area with the task of preventing enemy troops from spreading to other sections of the suburb. Since most houses in this area are made of bricks and concrete, the friendly troops tried to tighten the noose while assaulting house by house. They soon found that their task could not be completed during the day. It was in this area that Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Police Director General, was severely wounded when he led his troops in a particularly bold attack.

The insurgents had less chance in towntown Saigon. The few groups that succeeded in penetrating the area, were speedily eliminated. Most typical of this was a Viet Cong group that arrived at De Tham Street from the areas of Cau Kho, Rach Ban, and Ben Chuong Duong. The De Tham area is among the most populated in Saigon. The enemy group included about ten men equipped with AK.47 automatic rifles and grenades. They were engaged in armed propaganda when police from the Second Precinct arrived on the scene. A lone grenade explosion threw the group into confusion, permitting the police to kill three of them, including a woman cadre, take three prisoners and capture two AK.47's and two pistols.

Also in this general area a small Viet Cong force trying to reach the Rach Ban bridge was met by Major Tran Minh Cong at the head of a police squad. The enemy opened fire and slightly wounded the major whose rapid reaction resulted in the death of one of the intruders. Paying no attention to his wound, Cong immediately ordered his troops to assault a house in which the intruders had sought refuge.

The communists tried to resist but the gallant policemen shot one of them to death and took two women cadre prisoners. In this house police later found eight AK. 47 automatic rifles, four Chinese Communist pistols, a loudspeaker and a mimeograph machine.

Cau Kho was the third area to be penetrated by the Viet Cong but when a police group was sent in, communist resistance was found to be very weak. The sweep was completed by 1000 hours resulting in one enemy dead, four captured including two women cadre, and four individual weapons confiscated. The women were about 22 years of age and had all necessary papers to allow them to live undisturbed in government controlled areas.

The De Tham front was much more serious at the beginning but police here, too, were most effective and the area returned to normal in the afternoon.

In the Third Precinct, a four-man sapper group of Viet Cong appeared on Nguyen Thien Thuat Street but they were speedily eliminated. Fighting began at 0500 hours when a police jeep was hit by VC sniper fire starting an operation which became the responsibility of the local riot police unit.

When the Viet Cong group, which included three men and a girl, sought refuge in a house of Alley 22 the owner of the place at once notified police of their unwanted presence. A search was immediately undertaken resulting in two communist dead and the two others captured including the girl. Two AK. 47 automatic rifles and two pistols were also taken along with some explosives. The Ban Co area settled back to normal.

At Xom Chieu in the Fourth Precinct four women cadre had barely started their propaganda activities when they were captured. They had four Chinese Communists pistols. In the Fifth Precinct the enemy was still in control of the main administrative building when Lieutenant Colonel Le Ngoc Tru, the local police chief, led his troops in an assault on the VC held building.

Unable to resist, the intruders tried to flee but seven of them were shot dead and six individual weapons taken. Another Viet Cong group starting from the corner of Tran Quy and Pho Co Dieu streets tried to assault the local police station but fell into an ambush. Six were killed and five taken prisoners.

In the Sixth Precinct beside the clash reported at Binh Thoi the enemy's pressure was so intense that in the morning the local inhabitants started evacuating the area. Following this, VC presence became more acutely felt in the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Precincts. Especially in this last area enemy gunners had set up mortar positions from which they could fire on the city. Although no major actions were reported during the day, it was feared the enemy had infiltrated enough men to cause further trouble.

In summary for the 14 hours from 0400 hours to 1800 hours of the Fifth of May 1968, 32 communists were killed, 25 captured and 70 weapons confiscated. On the side of police six riot policemen made the supreme sacrifice.

6 May 1968. The enemy opened another front at the Bay Hien intersection near the airport. An enemy unit had penetrated this area following Village Road 14, Ho Tan Duc and Le Van Duyet Streets, to arrive at the cemetery of the French Army. But this communist unit was to be completely destroyed by an airborne element moved in from Bien Hoa.

In the afternoon by 1800 hours a VC sapper group again appeared at Level Crossing Number Six shooting to death a US serviceman who happened to ride his Honda motorcycle through the area. An operation was immediately launched resulting in the death of three of the Viet Cong but the communists continued to hide in houses bordering the railways track.

Meanwhile the fighting continued in Thi Nghe, although at a lesser degree of intensity. Only in Binh Thoi was it growing more serious in spite of airpower that ground troops had to call in. In the evening Colonel Dam Van Quy Special, Assistant to General Loan, was mortally wounded while inspecting the troops in the area of Minh Phung and Phu Lam.

During the night enemy gunners again shelled the city. Warheads fell in several places especially on Nguyen Canh Chan Street near the Cho Quan Electricity Complex, the Taxi Terminal

on Nguyen Hue Boulevard, and the Saigon Police Headquarters. One 122mm rocket also hit Hotel Catinat on Nguyen Hue Boulevard in downtown Saigon.

7 May 1968. Enemy troops again appeared in the Eighth Precinct more precisely on Pham The Hien Quay. The situation in the Binh Thoi area grew more serious as ground troops found themselves with the impossible task of penetrating these VC held parts of the city. In the afternoon jets were called in to strike both areas especially Binh Thoi, where many fires were immediately reported sending high into the sky many columns of black smoke.

All through the night flares were seen illuminating the sky while houses were still burning by the hundreds. In spite of the curfew order the population from outlying areas flocked downtown. Nothing could be done to prevent the movement. These refugees chose public buildings, schools and parks for refuge.

With the exception of Thi Nghe where a Marine operation resulted in restoration of complete order by 1300 hours and the Bay Hien intersection where normalcy was also restored, the situation throughout the outlying sections of the big metropolis remained unchanged.

8 May 1968. The situation in Cholon grew more serious with enemy troops reaching the Binh Tien Bridge, Hau Giang Boulevard, Minh Phung Street and such neighboring areas as Bai Say, Nam A, and Lo Gom. A government force was dispatched here in the morning succeeded in driving the intruders to the Lo Gom area which came under air attack by 1300 hours. Meanwhile, the situation in the Eighth Precinct continued to be serious forcing allied planes to attack some locations in this area.

9 May 1968. The enemy tried to open a new front in the Khanh Hoi area - so far left untouched by the war - by concentrating his troops in the Tan Thuan Dong Village for a contemplated thrust on Khanh Hoi, administratively known as the Fourth Precinct. As soon as fighting started here, the local population once more left their homes to seek refuge in the city.

On this Ninth day of May, the enemy also sought to open a new front in the village of Tan Thoi Hiep in Go Vap District but his troops did not have a chance against an airborne force dispatched to block their way. Although fighting continued here for a full two days,

the enemy had to abandon his intention to infiltrate the city through this gate.

Meanwhile, the situation in Cholon continued to grow more serious. A look at this all important area indicates at least three major fronts, the Pham The Hien front in the Eighth Precinct where a strong communist force had been intensifying its pressure since the early hours of May 9; the Binh Tien front where the enemy had tried to occupy the installations of the Binh Tay Distilleries, and the Minh Phung front where insurgent troops had sought to occupy high buildings from where they could make their presence felt.

Because of the seriousness of the situation, US troops were seen for the first time taking part in city fighting. Government Rangers supported by an armored element of the US Ninth Infantry Division counterattacked vigorously in the Minh Phung area which also was the target of gunship strafing. Many fires again broke out in this area that continued well into the night.

A few hours later around 0400 hours of the following day enemy gunners again shelled the Tan Son Nhut Airport with over ten 122mm rockets.

10 May 1968. The Khanh Hoi front had grown serious during the night, forcing a US armored group to take position early in the morning of 10 May on both sides of the Tan Thuan Bridge. The situation in the "Y" Bridge area also grew difficult necessitating the intervention of the Air Force in that part of the city for four hours. Following this an all night gun battle could be heard in this area with many instances of fire breaking out.

Meanwhile in the Minh Phung sector fighting went on unabated. Elsewhere, most noticeable was the collapse of the Thi Nghe Bridge when a big armored column crossed it to enter the city.

11 May 1968. Fighting around the "Y" Bridge continued all day. Early in the morning an element of the US Ninth Infantry Division had crossed the bridge to attack Viet Cong resistance groups in the area of Pham The Hien and Au Duong Lan Streets. The infantrymen were supported by tanks and by early evening were in control of the target area, relieving pressure around the La San School where a friendly unit had sought refuge. Many houses in this part of the city also continued to burn.

In Cholon, especially in such streets as Minh Phung,

Road 46 and Phu Tho, the situation quieted down for a while but a Ranger group moving to Binh Thoi was to meet with strong enemy resistance in the afternoon. Bombers and helicopter gunships were immediately dispatched against the enemy in a raid that climaxed with the explosion of 700-pound bombs. By the light of flares the Rangers assumed full control of the Binh Thoi area a little before midnight.

The 11th day of May was to mark the beginning of the allied counterattack in Saigon. It also was to be remembered by the creation of the Student Division for the protection of the capital city.

12 May 1968. With the Rangers in complete control of the Fifth and Sixth Precincts friendly troops launched a major attack against enemy positions on the other side of the "Y" Bridge. The fight continued all morning but by noon the allies were in control of the area. This victory eliminated the last communist troops fighting in this part of the city.

At nightfall enemy gunners fired a few 82mm mortar rounds that landed in a small alley leading to Do Thanh Nhan Street. Some hours later they also raided the highway bridge near Saigon and partly damaged the bridge.

The following day the situation in the capital and outlying areas had returned to normal. After a week of intense fighting in Saigon the following casualty figures were recorded on both sides.

A total of 2509 communist troops were killed and 221 captured by US and South Vietnamese troops. 405 enemy troops were eliminated by Saigon Police and another 68 were killed by the Regional and Popular Forces who also took ten prisoners. In all a total of 2982 intruders were killed and 231 captured.

Against these battle casualties the allied command recorded 67 US fatalities and 333 American wounded. Seventy government troops were killed and 303 wounded while 65 policemen lost their lives and 306 were hospitalized. The Regional and Popular Forces Command put its losses at eight killed and 37 wounded. Overall allied casualties were 210 dead and 979 wounded.

SECOND PERIOD

In this second period there were two fronts. One was in Saigon's northern suburb of Gia Dinh while the other was in the

southern outskirts of Cholon.

North of the capital city the communist First and Fifth Military Sub-Regions had directed two regiments and some sapper troops to Saigon. The Dong Nai Regiment including Battalions K. 3 and K. 4, and the Quyet Thang Regiment, including two battalions of the same appellations, had spread thin in their attempt to reach the city.

As early as 23 May elements of the Dong Nai Regiment had taken advantage of loopholes in the security belt around the capital to reach its outskirts. Although fighting started two days later it can be assumed the enemy did not want to initiate it so early but had to fight when his troops betrayed their presence.

At the beginning the enemy infiltrated some of his troops based in the area of An Phu Dong especially the light command post of the Dong Nai Regiment and the K. 3 or Phu Loi Battalion. These troops easily penetrated the area of the Tap Thanh Pagoda in Hamlet Seven where they waited for the main body of troops to arrive. They also expected to go from there to Gia Dinh Town and from there enter Saigon's First Precinct.

But their presence at the Tap Thanh Pagoda was reported and immediately brought about an operation by government forces. In spite of a Viet Cong attempt to enlarge the battle area fighting was to be limited to Hamlet Seven, the Cau Son Bridge, the Bang Ky Bridge and the Cay Queo and Cay Thi sectors.

The fighting on the Bang Ky Bridge was to be the least intense of all. Government Marines quickly overcame communist resistance only to find that most intruders had left the area, leaving behind only a few small units to try to secure penetration routes for later reinforcements.

In the region of the Tap Thanh Pagoda the South Vietnamese airborne element dispatched to counter the communist threat encountered strong and determined resistance from the enemy. The insurgents had also prepared themselves for the fight and it was to take the government troops 13 full days to restore order in this section of the city. It was declared pacified on 5 June 1968.

On the communist side the Quyet Thang Regiment with its two battalions, Go Mon 1 and 2, arrived at the Rach Ong area on the last day of May. They immediately tried to reach the Cay Thi section to reinforce those already within the big city. They were

stopped by Marines as they reached the Bang Ky Bridge, the scene of some intense fighting which lasted for two days.

On 5 June as the Tap Thanh front battle ended fighting moved to the Cay Queo area insurgents keeping as close as possible to government troops in the rectangle made by Ngo Tung Chau, Hoang Hoa Tham, Le Quang Dinh, and an unnamed street. Meanwhile, some of the intruders also tried to sneak through Xom Thom to hit at various targets near the Joint General Staff Compound. On this front heavy casualties forced the enemy to withdraw on the eleventh day of June.

As fighting died down in Cay Queo fighting immediately moved on to Cay Thi where it became very intense. After exactly one week of bitter fighting the intruders did their best to get away but they were to find the undertaking impossible. Survivors of the Quyet Thang (Determined to Win) Regiment surrendered en masse on 18 June 1968.

In summary the Quyet Thang Regiment was something of the past following the surrender of 152 members of its First and Second Battalions. In the words of one of the prisoners, Senior Captain Phan Van Xuong, "The Quyet Thang Regiment had 400 men when the fighting began but as of the afternoon of 17 June had only 229 men left, of which 120 were wounded to various degrees".

The regimental commander,a man by the name of Ba Vinh,died in the first minutes of the battle. He was replaced by the political commissar Hai Phai. Yet according to Captain Xuong, "if one adds up those who had died and those who surrendered, the remaining strength of the Quyet Thang Regiment can be estimated at 20 stray or missing troops.

The Dong Nai Regiment also recorded heavy losses in the course of the early fighting especially in the area of Cay Queo. More particularly an element of this unit dispatched to Gia Dinh as reinforcement recorded incomparably heavy losses by an airborne force in An Phu Dong. The remaining 250 troops of the Dong Nai Regiment had no other alternative but to withdraw to Binh My about six miles Northwest of Tan Uyen District Town.

In Cholon the Viet Cong Second Military Sub-Region dispatched two battalions (Binh Tan Six and 308) to populated areas south of the China town. When they withdrew to their Ba Vu secret zone for recuperation only about 100 succeeded in arriving at their destination.

During all this period enemy gunners shelled the city every night but the intensity of these aerial attacks was reduced after 18 June. After the last attack on Tan Son Nhut Airport during the night of 21 June communist gunners completely stopped these attacks on the city.

Reasons for V.C. failure

On the basis of battles recorded in the initial days it is envisioned that the enemy had wanted to open two fronts.

The first front was to have been located in the areas of the Binh Loi Bridge, the Highway bridge, the Thi Nghe Suburb, and would have given the communist control over the northeastern part of Saigon, including the downtown section of Gia Dinh and the radio and television centers. The enemy apparently had assigned a division size force for this area which included the Dong Nai Regiment, the 274th Regiment, Battalion Di An Three and Battalion Thu Duc Four.

When the attack began the intruders met with failures after failures. They failed to overcome South Vietnamese resistance at the Binh Loi and Highways bridges. Their recorded heavy losses in their first battle put them in a most difficult situation. Although they were more successful at the Highway bridge by slightly damaging it they still were not able to block the highly mobile government forces which were able to quickly and easily arrive at the Hang Xanh and New Port areas, thus defeating the enemy's plan to occupy Downtown Gia Dinh.

All the intruders were able to do was to infiltrate a company size force in Thi Nghe where it was immediately isolated and destroyed about three days later. Following this, the enemy refrained from opening any new fronts in this general area.

Thus the enemy failed in his attempt to penetrate the capital city through its northeastern outskirts because of the failure to take the first objective, the bridge.

The second front was located in the western outskirts of the city in the area of Binh Thoi. In this direction the enemy High Command had deployed an important force including all the components of the CT. 9 Division, two artillery battalions of Regiment 208, and Regiment 697 including Battalions 267, 269 and Binh Tan Six. At one point it appeared that one battalion of Regiment 88 was also present in this area. This force apparently had come to Saigon

from the border area of Long An and Hau Nghia provinces.

The intruders were stopped the day following their arrival in this area. They did not dare enter the city during the day time for fear of being decimated by airstrikes. Instead they penetrated the sprawling metropolis in small groups trying to avoid allied troops, thus never massing enough strength for a coordinated attack. Likewise their fifth column sapper units were cripled during the first day thus making their outside probe ineffective.

The Viet Cong tactics had been one to attack the city both from within with sappers and from without with regular troops. The attack from within was to include many armed female propaganda teams. But this tactic never had a chance of materializing since all propaganda groups worked in complete isolation without the support of the people.

Since Saigon is such a large and sprawling city the few propaganda teams that the Viet Cong could muster had no impact. Thus, their propaganda battle was ineffective. Riot police speedily annihilated those few small teams that did exist.

On the second day the enemy continued his infiltration efforts in Saigon's western section, since interdiction artillery and flares possibly had prevented potential intruders from entering the city during dark. Although the enemy was unable to reinforce with more troops the front of Binh Thoi and Cholon expanded to a small degree, because of the situation in the build-up area.

A new battle line was visible on the second day at the intersection of Bay Hien. Here the elements of the 272nd Regiment, a component of the CT. 9 Division, had the task of attacking the Tan Son Nhut Airbase and penetrating neighboring areas. The intruders had counted on the element of surprise that did not exist. They had attempted to come into town in small groups but had failed to set up liaison among themselves. Thus without proper liaison they were unable to mount a coordinated attack. It was the end of the Bay Hien front.

On the following days the enemy High Command continued to deploy more troops in this area especially those that took part in the "Tet" offensive, for example the Phu Loi Battalion, Battalion 808, Battalion Nha Be Five, and Battalion 265. All these units came towards Saigon from the south.

These units were more successful since they succeeded in penetrating some of the populous areas and were able to stay there. The reason for their relative success is attributed to the weak defense line maintained in this part of the metropolis.

Prior to the May offensive defense around Saigon included only ten battalions deployed as follows : the first Airborne Task Force in Go Vap and An Nhon, the Fifth Ranger Group in Phu Tho Hoa, Marine Task Force "A" in the area of Binh Loi and highways bridges. Within Saigon there was only the Riot Police.

Considering the few units the defense of Saigon's southern section was rather weak. The southern approach was given little attention by the allied high command. Further to the South there were some deployed US infantry battalions of the Ninth and 25 Infantry Divisions.

The American battalions, moreover, were strong forces that were only efficient against big enemy units. Against the many small groups of communist infiltrators the Americans could not do much. Once the Communists had entered the city, they tried their best to keep to populated areas to prevent strong allied reaction. The first infiltrators were to establish some kind of bridgehead for later reinforcement which together were to make a thrust against the center of the city.

With this tactic enemy troops did all they could to occupy a large area west and south of Saigon. To cope with the mounting danger, the allies had to call in airpower and the intervention of US ground troops. These, however, resulted in over 8,000 houses destroyed in the Pham The Hien area alone.

North of Saigon the enemy failed prior to entering the outlying areas. The 101st Viet Cong Regiment, reputedly one of the best for street-fighting, was destroyed by government airborne forces.

In summary, the second Viet Cong offensive resulted in a collapse of the morale of Viet Cong troops. It was also the first time communist soldiers surrendered en masse more than once. Such famed units as the Dong Nai and Quyet Tien Regiments were completely destroyed during this phase of the attack. The battle resulted in the death of some 3,600 communist soldiers out of a total deployment of some 7,000. Over 55% of the initial Viet Cong force

was thus destroyed in a few days.

Some phase II battles

The Thi Nghe Battle (5-7 May): Fighting started in Thi Nghe when a brick carrying truck discharged its load of Viet Cong soldiers during the early hours of May 5 near the Phan Thanh Gian bridge. The intruders immediately tried to blow up a sentry post nearby with their B. 40 individual rocket launchers.

Following the first attack the Viet Cong penetrated the populous end of Tu Duc Street and occupied most buildings there. They then called in reinforcements. This initial attack took place at 0300 hours with the participation of a company size force. It was later identified as Company C. 2 of the Phu Loi first Battalion.

The government troops had one company of Navy men on the Phan Thanh Gian Bridge. Corporal Lam Van Mao reacted quickly to the Viet Cong presence but the Naval force was too weak to prevent the enemy from continuing his advance.

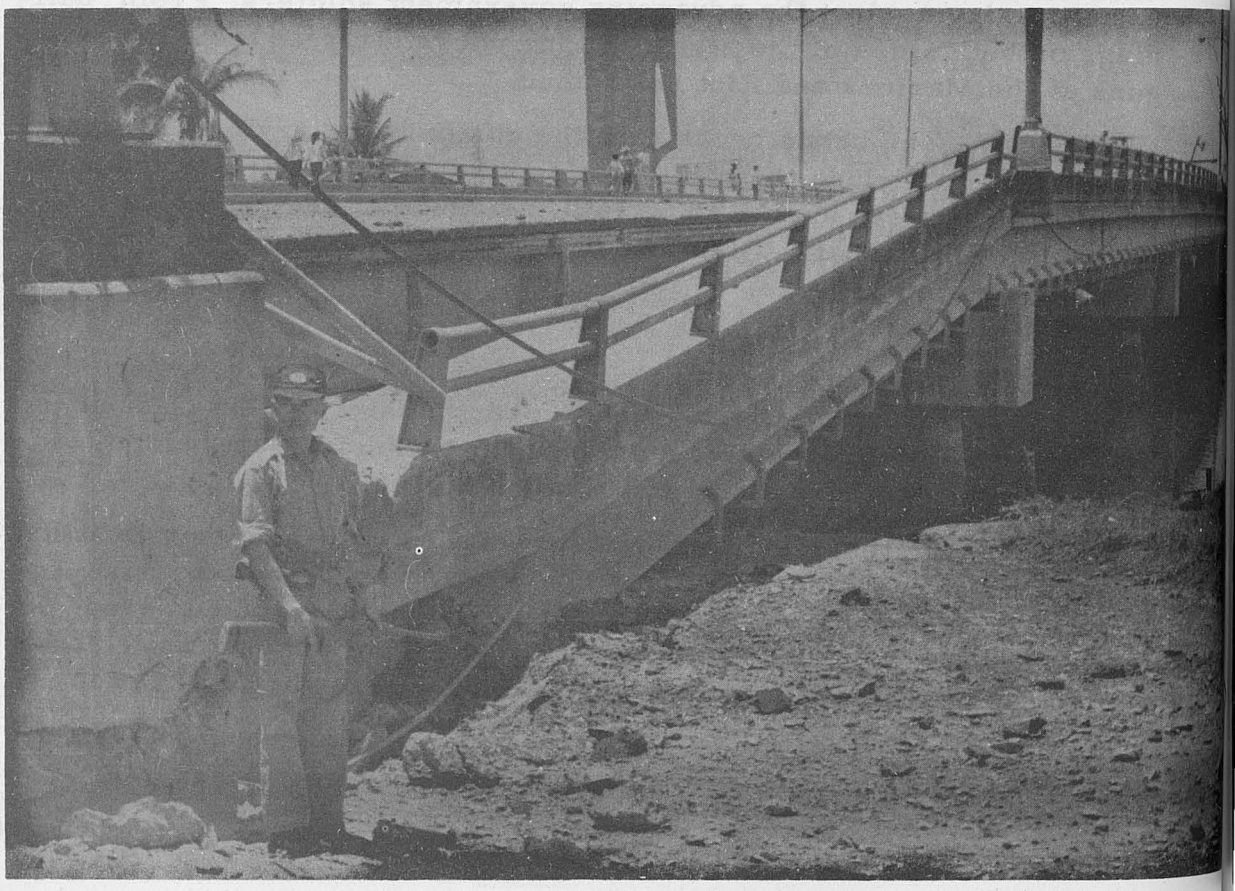
At 0415 hours a combined force of South Vietnamese Marines (the Fifth Marine Battalion) and riot police arrived and prepared to attack the VC occupied area. The enemy had had time to prepare for counteracting against the advancing government soldiers. From buildings on both sides of the street the intruders directed their machine-guns at the Marines and Riot policemen.

The battle began with the communists trying to expand their areas to include the radio station and political warfare compound nearby. They were unable to do this. Meanwhile, they had blown up part of the Phan Thanh Gian bridge and some houses in the vicinity and wounded ten persons. In spite of the damaged bridge traffic was still able to cross.

At about the same time another Viet Cong group tried to overrun the resource control post near the highway but policemen standing guard there reacted quickly killing one of the intruders and capturing three others along with some weapons.

In the morning of the fifth day in May the situation in that part of the city was one of utmost confusion. While police tried to prevent the people from moving around explosions could be heard in the direction of the Thanh Tam poultry farm. Fire engines wailed their way to the New Port which had just been hit by mortar fire. In the

In the early hours of 5 May 1968, the Phan Thanh Gian bridge was blown up by VC agents. Some damage was reported as may be seen on this picture.



View from the side.



Tanks arriving to dislodge VC agents from some of the houses they had occupied on Tu Duc street.



From the bridge on the Bien Hoa highways, government soldiers directed their fire at VC troops taking refuge in Tu Duc street.

direction of the Binh Loi Bridge a gas station was burning sending a black column of smoke high into the sky. The people of Thi Nghe tried their best to evacuate the battle area.

The enemy reacted most carefully when the government troops attempted to tighten their noose around the VC occupied houses. At times, an explosion could be heard but the intruders were not to be seen anywhere. It was in this area that Police Director General Nguyen Ngoc Loan was wounded in both legs in the afternoon. Seven of the government troops lost their lives.

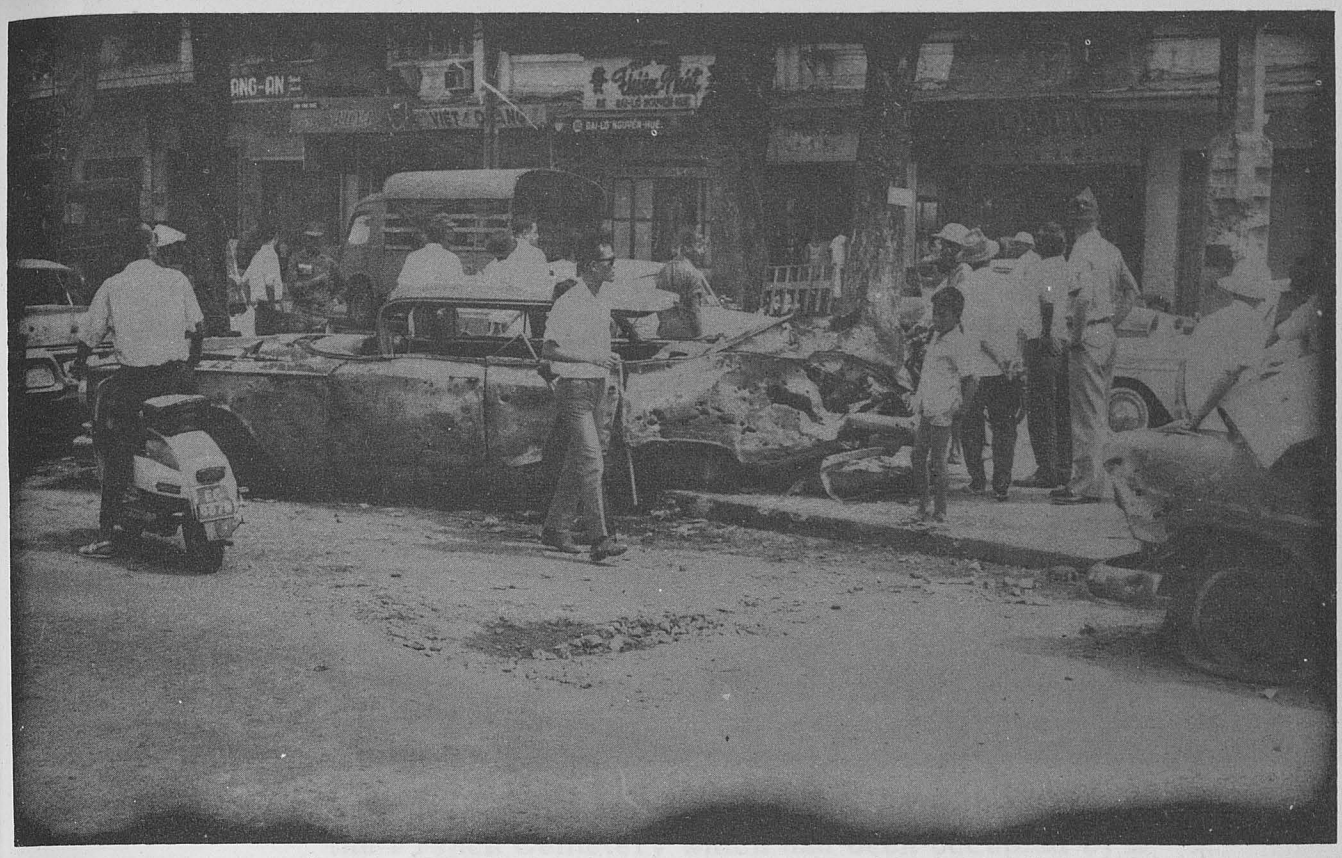
The fight continued well into the dark hours. By evening, it was estimated that only two Viet Cong platoons were in the Tu Duc primary school area but it was the opinion of many that they would not stay there during the night. At dawn reinforcements came in the form of a ranger unit and a few armored cars. A two-pronged counter attack was made with the Rangers coming in from the Hang Xanh area and the other prong made up of Government Marines pushing in from Tu Duc Street.

Polwar troops also came in telling the enemy to surrender and the people to evacuate the battle zone.They were to be greeted by a few shots from the enemy but prior to the real attack silence prevailed in the area adding to the impression of awe felt by all those watching the fight in this part of the city.

At 0935 two armored cars advanced slowly on Nguyen Binh Khiem Street shooting continuously at buildings bordering on the street. The enemy reacted strongly forcing the armored vehicles to halt their advance. A few minutes later government rangers tried an assault on a major communist position but were thrown back.

According to Lieutenant Huynh Thien Mang who commanded the Fourth Company of the 35th Ranger Battalion the communist this time had adpoted a rather good strategy. By spreading out they rendered air strikes ineffective. And by occupying many different buildings, they made the tasks of government troops doubly difficult. In Mang s words "this is most visible in the troops" inability to take a third building after successfully assaulting two houses nearby. The Rangers could not dislodge the enemy from it because they were physically exhausted after climbing from floor to floor. As they dodged enemy bullets and grenades.

At 1040 hours a Ranger platoon received the order to assault the last objective. Although enemy counter fire was intense



In support of their comrades in Saigon, Communist gunners mortared and rocketed the capital many times each night. Above is the view of an impact area in downtown Saigon.



Fire, fire, fire. Photo take in Thi Nghe on 6 May 1968.

Private 2nd Class Nguyen Van Thanh succeeded in capturing a mortar tube. This did not halt communist resistance since at 1100 hours the enemy continued to mortar the radio station and many nearby installations. The Agrarian Service of Thi Nghe and a gas station nearby were hit and began to burn.

In the meantime some communists tried to penetrate the section of Thi Nghe near the Old People's House which resulted in some fighting in the area. By night fall calm again prevailed with the communist withdrawing to the Old People's Home. The following day houses continued to burn in Thi Nghe and the civilian population continued to try to get out.

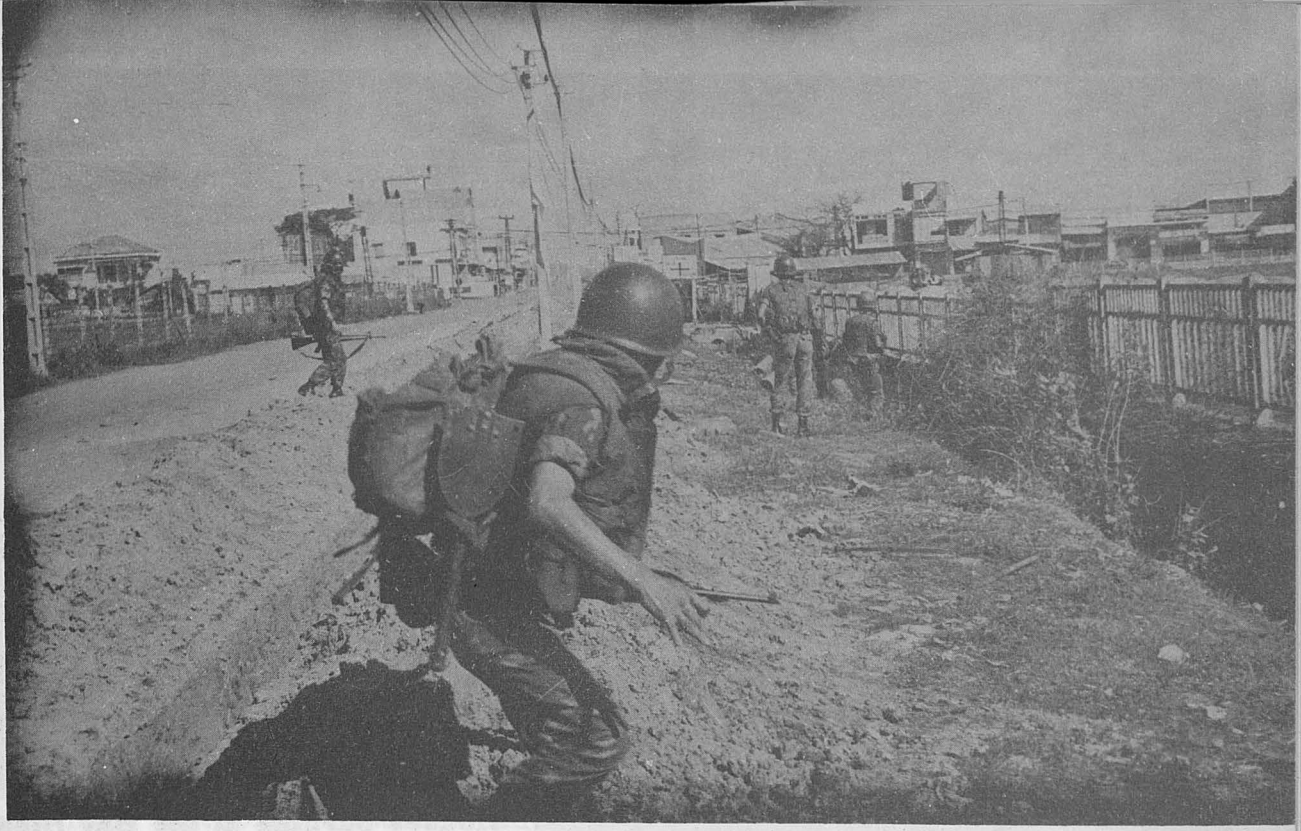
By 0700 hours that morning a Marine company under Captain Phan Van Tan received the order to mount a final assault on the Old People's Home. The fight quickly grew in intensity causing some additional fires and requiring more fire fighting equipment. In reporting about the situation Major Phan Van Thang stated that by the third day of the Thi Nghe battle the enemy had about a platoon left in the Old People's Home area.

Since Thi Nghe is basically a shanty town divided by narrow and winding alleys, the government soldiers had a most difficult task dislodging the intruders. Moreover, the enemy made the task more difficult by resorting to guerrilla tactics that take considerable patience and time to defeat.

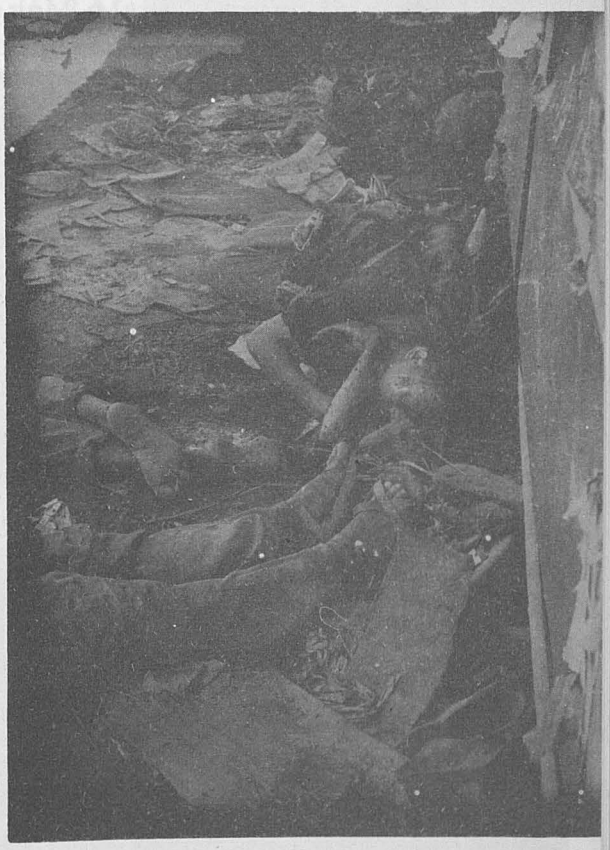
By 1000 hours the Marines had the area under control. The remaining Viet Cong were completely surrounded. The fighting continued until past noon resulting in ten enemy soldiers killed, three taken prisoners, and 15 weapons confiscated.

In summary, the enemy lost 27 dead, 20 taken prisoners including several women cadre, 38 weapons of all kinds confiscated. Most remarkable was the uniform of enemy troops who wore shirts similar to those of the paratroops. Women cadre wore blue jeans. On the government side there were seven killed and two weapons lost. At least 100 civilian houses burned.

Some of the Viet Cong who succeeded in withdrawing from Thi Nghe were to meet with government Marines in the area of the Binh Loi Bridge. They apparently had wanted to cross the Saigon river and take refuge at the Trung Hamlet of the Binh Trung Village some 500 yards from Cat Lai. But the enemy unit was caught by the Marines who killed eleven communists and captured nine of their weapons.



Troopers of the Seventh Airborne Battalion assaulting the French Cemetery which had been occupied by a Viet Cong force.



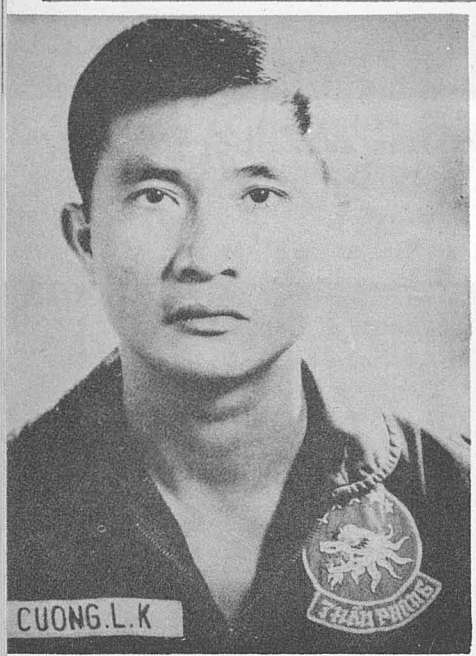


TNT packages intended to blow up the Binh Loi bridge were confiscated by Government Marines (5 May 1968)

Dead Viet Cong following the South Vietnamese attack against the Communist held French cemetery.



Houses burning at the Bay Hien intersection on 6 May .



Colonel Luu Kim Cuong, 33rd Air Wing Commander, died on 6 May 1968 trying to defeat **enemy forces near the airport.**



An air view of the Bay Hien area afire.

The Binh Loi Battle (5 May). The Binh Loi Bridge Battle started at 0400 hours in the morning of 5 May when an estimated two companies of Viet Cong Troops attacked the Marine positions. The assailants were repulsed following two hours of intense fighting.

Major Nguyen Xuan Phuc who had commanded the Sixth Marine Battalion for only two days told the press that the communists had brought with them an important quantity of explosives with the evident intention of blowing up this all important bridge. They failed to complete their mission but instead lost 42 of their comrades to government soldiers who also took 17 communist weapons and confiscated 200 kilos of TNT.

The Second Company of the Second Marine Battalion was the government unit most involved in the fighting here. According to Captain Nguyen Van Tong the company commander, his troops had been fully prepared to counterattack the enemy since they had had one hour to prepare themselves for the task. When the intruders arrived the Vietnamese Leathernecks were ready for just such an eventuality. Without the factor of surprise; the Viet Cong were quickly defeated.

The gas depot of Binh Loi was set afire sending into the sky a big column of smoke visible for many miles.

The Bay Hien Intersection Battle (6-7 May). During this battle the enemy troops penetrated the area along some of the many alleys leading to Le Van Duyet Boulevard and from there entered the French cemetery. They were sighted by policemen standing guard at a police station nearby.

A few minutes later explosions could be heard which were carried by enemy soldiers trying to cut through the defense perimeter of the Tan Son Nhut airbase. They failed in this attempt as it had become quite light when they started. Not only were they unable to make a breach in the belt of barbed wire around the all important installation, but they were stuck in an open area and had to occupy some of the building nearby in an effort to resist the advancing government troops.

Counterattacking in this area were the airbase defense forces under the command of Colonel Luu Kim Cuong Commander of the 33rd Air Wing and concurrently commander of the Tan Son Nhut Special Zone. Colonel Cuong was hit by enemy fire and died at about 0930 hours. Before he died his troops had been able to completely isolate the enemy.

On the other side of the airport the organic defense force of the airbase occupied a line going from the Tomb of Bishop Adran to the Paratroops Camp of Hoang Hoa Tham on Le Van Duyet and Nguyen Van Thoai Street. There were some American troops standing guard at various US installations. Along this line facing the cemetery there was a platoon of Korean soldiers keeping a watch from the Korean Radio Station they were assigned to defend. The communists were locked in a tight noose.

To complete the noose Skyraider fighter bombers arrived at 0830 hours to pound suspected VC positions in the cemetery. At about noon the Seventh Airborne Battalion under Major Nguyen Van Ngoc arrived from Bien Hoa to attack the enemy. The crack airborne troops immediately assaulted the enemy position within sight of an admiring public composed of local residents and journalists from many nations.

The assault came to a quick end resulting in 60 communist dead, 11 captured, and 30 weapons confiscated. Included in this booty was a 75mm recoiless rifle which the enemy had fortunately not used. It was also fortunate that communist troops had failed to occupy the big Quoc Gia Nghia Tu School from where they could have created many difficulties for the counterattacking troops.

In this battle over 100 civilian houses on Le Van Duyet Street were destroyed. The Shell Gas Station at the Bay Hien Intersection also was set afire but the fire was put out by a big storm one of the many in that season.

According to Viet Cong prisoners the enemy unit was an element of the 272nd Regiment (CT. 9 Division) with the task of penetrating this area for an all out attack on the Tan Son Nhut Airbase and the nearby Hoang Hoa Tham Camp of the Airborne Division. They, however, came too late for a surprise attack. Those that reached the French cemetery were completely destroyed while the others took to their heels in the direction of Phu Tho Hoa.

Although the battle ended in the afternoon of 6 May, it was to take the government troops another day to end all communist resistance in this area, especially that of some Viet Cong who had taken refuge in the pilot farm of the Ministry of Agriculture. Traffic on Nguyen Van Thoai Street was back to normal on 8 May.

The Battle of Binh Thoi (5-12 May) : The battle in this area started at about 0400 hours when a 20 man Viet Cong force made its appearance on Binh Thoi road in an attempt to attack the Cau Tre

Police Station. As they were preparing for the task, a police riot unit arrived on the scene and a hand-to-hand fight ensued that resulted in the death of four communists and the capture of another two. The enemy withdrew in the direction of Road 46.

Immediately an operation was ordered that at once resulted in heavy contact with the enemy when the operating troops approached the leather factory of Phu Tho. The operating troops included the 33rd Ranger Battalion, the Fifth Reconnaissance Company, and an armored group but this strong force could not advance in the face of determined resistance from the enemy. A temporary halt was ordered and airstrikes were called in to support the ground fighters.

The situation appeared to deteriorate the following day for in spite of air intervention and flares illuminating the sky throughout the night more enemy troops came in. On 6 May, enemy troops appeared practically everywhere in the Phu Tho and Road 46 areas. Meeting with the press on that day, Police Chief Major Nguyen Dinh Lan of the Sixth Precinct told journalists that the communist pressure against his area had grown more intense.

After 50 hours of fighting, the communist battle strength here had increased many times substantiating the theory that they again wanted to penetrate the Sixth Precinct, from where they could easily reach the Fifth Precinct and enter the downtown section of Saigon. Like during the "Tet" attack this communist attempt was to be blocked at Road 46.

That night, however, many small groups of Viet Cong crossed Minh Phung Street and killed Colonel Dam Van Quy when he was on his way to inspect some police units near the Duy Linh Plaza. From a high building bordering on the street Viet Cong gunners hit the colonel's jeep with two rockets that turned the vehicle upside down. Colonel Quy was found to be killed by an AK. 47 bullet.

Meanwhile, in order to block the Viet Cong infiltration movement, an element of the US Ninth Infantry Division had been dispatched to Binh Thoi where it clashed with the enemy and inflicted on him heavy casualties. A few hours later the enemy intensified his effort to send more men to the Duy Linh Plaza at the end of Tran Quoc Toan Boulevard. This was to bring about the intervention of the 35th Ranger Battalion under Major Ho Van Hoa and a local police force.



Minh Phung street during the May fighting



One of the many anti-aircraft machineguns taken from the enemy on Minh Phung **street.**

In the decisive of 9 May, soldiers of the 38th Ranger Battalion confiscated a Communist flag with the following slogan painted on it : 'We are determined to defeat the American pirates'.





One of the many Viet Cong flags confiscated in Saigon.

The fight immediately began with Viet Cong shooting from high buildings preventing a speedy advance of the government soldier While the fight expanded and grew more intense the local population did their best to leave the battle zone.

The 35th Ranger Battalion, reinforced by a M. 41 tank squadron, immediately started to fire 76mm cannons at Viet Cong positions on Minh Phung Street which ground forces tried to assault in the following minutes. Strong enemy resistance was to bring about an intervention of helicopter gunships that by mid-afternoon were joined by four skyraiders, but the enemy continued to resist. Two anti-aircraft batteries made the task of allied pilots much more difficult.

Again a fire started spreading from Minh Phung Street which firemen failed to put out because of the enemy's devastating firepower that did not even spare the red-helmeted troops. Whole sections in the area were thus destroyed.

In the evening enemy troops returned to Government controlled areas. Some of them even went so far as to come to the houses of civil servants and military personnel and asked to see the occupants. Apparently they were helped by informers since they often knew the residents by name. And in more than one case, the government employees were murdered before they even knew who their uninvited visitors were.

By 0200 hours of 8 May enemy troops again penetrated the Binh Tien Bridge area causing the 35th Ranger Battalion to be immediately dispatched there as reinforcements. A fierce clash immediately developed that resulted in the intervention of three gunships discharging their rockets on VC positions in the glaring afternoon sunshine.

On Luc Tinh and Phu Tho Boulevards a group of US tanks in conjunction with the Rangers were advancing towards the targets on a VC body littered path. Still, the enemy troops resisted by concentrating their firepower on the advancing troops. Firemen came behind the soldiers but they again were unable to put out the many fires that had been started in this area.

On two four-storied buildings on Minh Phung Boulevard, enemy antiaircraft and other big guns were located, from where the insurgents tried to stop the allied advance. A 75mm recoiless rifle was also there to stop the moving tanks.

At midnight a platoon of Rangers assaulted one of the VC occupied buildings by climbing up the gutters. This surprise attack made government soldiers the masters of a few neighboring houses on the left side of Minh Phung Boulevard.

Immediately after discovering the VC machinegun position, the Rangers of the Fourth Company pushed in from two directions one of which was intended to deceive enemy gunners. The Viet Cong fell for the deception and directed their fire in one direction leaving Ranger elements practically free access to their target. A number of well-directed M. 79 grenades immediately silenced the two machineguns but the 75mm cannon site was still untouched.

Fighting continued fiercely all day. The following day government troops cut the area into many smaller sections to facilitate the elimination of the communist intruders and the reduction of their resistance points. While the Rangers had the houses on the right side under control, the communists kept to the buildings on the left side. A seesaw battle ensued with enemy and friendly troops trying to get control over each inch of land.

From a high building, a witness reported three anti-aircraft machineguns and many other weapons lying near charred Viet Cong bodies. Not far from there was an enemy occupied building which ground assaults had failed to secure. Air strikes again were called in. The battle grew more intense with government troops and enemy soldiers fighting for each house and running after one another in the street.

According to the commander of the 38th Ranger Battalion, the Viet Cong had dug holes in walls separating the civilian houses so that they could move around unobserved. Many bunkers were also made to help protect them from aerial attacks. From occupied buildings they practically isolated by their intense fire a group of government soldiers assaulting the house that harbored the 75mm gun. The government troops carried the day and captured the house. In this attack the government troops killed six communists and recorded ten wounded.

As the day moved on the fighting grew even more intense with the enemy trying to block all the alleys in the area with intense firepower. The situation grew hotter with each passing minute and the Rangers finally were only able to move from one house to the next by digging their way around.

Government troops also came across immense difficulties trying to evacuate the 75mm cannon they had just captured. A GMC was

brought over but one of its tires was flat. Another communist crew served weapon also lay in the way.

From a multistoried building the Viet Cong continued their fire. A tank was called in that blew up the house in a matter of a second sending pieces and bits of Viet Cong flesh all around. But when some government soldiers tried to go in for the scattered weapons enemy fire quickly drove them off. Finally, in order to get the 75mm gun four of the strongest soldiers were dispatched while all the fire-power that could be mustered was called onto the suspected Viet Cong positions.

The Minh Phung front by that time had grown into a sea of fire from which enemy soldiers could not get away. But knowing they were now trapped, the communists resisted with the furor of men knowing they were to die. While airplanes and artillery continued their pounding of the target area, government soldiers moved in three columns against the intruders. The Minh Phung front was pronounced secure at 2030 hours of 10 May.

Following the battle it was determined that the Viet Cong suffered at least 30 dead in this area although real communist casualties may be much higher. Some were taken prisoners who declared they had belonged to the 267th battalion.

In this last decisive battle Government Rangers captured one 75mm recoiless rifle, two East German machineguns , two Chinese submachineguns, two anti-aircraft guns, one B. 41 and one B. 40 rocket launchers, one AK. 47 automatic rifle, 12 AK. 50 rifles, and a large quantity of ammunition, Most interesting was the capture of a flag with the following words inscribed on it, "We are determined to defeat the American Pirates".

The Minh Phung front had just been terminated when the 38th Ranger Battalion was moved to Binh Thoi. The troops arrived there by 1600 hours and immediately were informed by the people that the insurgents had arrived at the Phu Tho Hoa cemetery.

The Rangers immediately pushed on in two columns with the First Company trying to overtake the enemy from a southern direction while the Second Company assaulting the enemy in a frontal attack. Intense enemy fire prevented the Second Company from marching in and the second column of Ranger was also blocked in its infiltration attempt.

The communists who were elements of the 267th Battalion, had the advantage of natural obstacles. They also had prepared for the battle. Half an hour afterwards the Rangers again had to call in air-power which came in the form of four helicopter gunships and four jets.

At 2000 hours after the target area had been saturated with bullets and bombs, the ground troops again went in. Although having suffered much from the raids, the enemy was still quite strong and resisting vigorously. But at the approach of midnight government soldiers gained full control over the area.

Taking part in this battle was a company of the Viet Cong 267th Battalion the remnant of which took to their heels in the direction of Phu Tho Hoa.

On the morning May 12th, the Rangers conducted a search operation in Binh Thoi. This battle actually came to an end during the day without firing a shot.

The results of the attack on the cemetery were as follows: 26 V. C. were killed by body count.This did not include a number of corpses torn to pieces or charred in the paddies. Captured equipment included 5 AK. 47,one 60mm mortar,and a quantity of signal items 2 V. C. were also taken prisoner. The weapons as compared to the VC killed in action were relatively few because many other weapons might have been thrown into the abundant streams in the battle area.

The battle claimed 2 Rangers killed and 5 lightly wounded. The Ox stable area, the Market Garden at Rural Road 14, Binh Thoi Bamboo Bridge Sub-precinct were totally devastated. Houses burned down because most of them in the suburbs were made of palm leaves.

At enemy combat positions, dug-outs were full of straw to cover the floor for the troops to sit on without getting wet. Enemy fox-holes were dug under gourd arbors. Trench slits were neck deep in water. When friendly aircraft flew over the VC would dive into the water to take cover. Their battle area was about 4 square kilometers.

The battle of Binh Tien

(From May 8th to May 9th,1968)

After more than 2 days and nights of failure in trying to push through Road 46 and Xom Đat Street into Cholon, the Communists



Blaze at Renault Bridge
Photo recorded on May 9th, 1968.



Blaze at Binh Tien (Cholon) on May 9th, 1968.

launched a new thrust and attempted to cross Binh Tien Bridge on May 8th at 0200 hours.

The enemy force in execution of this action into the flank of Cholon was about 200 strong. Refugees flocked away but they were halted on the bridge because if they were allowed to move in throngs, the police would not be able to control them. The police forces positioned in the buildings rolled empty drums onto the streets and set up barricades to contain the flow of refugees. Suddenly another enemy force made its appearance from Hau Giang, Minh Phung Streets to establish a bridgehead for another force on the other side to cross over and from there to move ahead along Hau Giang Street in an attempt to seize Cholon.

An NLF flag was hung atop a lamppost in front of Quoc Viet School and another one at the end of the bridge. The Police force advanced to seize this crossroads. One policeman while trying to bring a flag down was seriously wounded.

Lieutenant Colonel Le Ngoc Tru, Chief of the 5th Police Precinct came with reinforcements. At the same time, about 7 o'clock in the morning, the 35th Ranger Battalion also arrived to reinforce. The Battalion was split into 2 columns; 1 company departing from Luc Tinh Street to advance along both sides of the streets to capture the Binh Tay Distillery and the remaining force to move to Binh Tien Bridge.

2 armored vehicles led the infantrymen for an assault on the bridge. The enemy opened up with B.40 fire which failed to hit the attackers. The armored vehicles returned fire and destroyed one ambush force and then withdrew to take blocking positions on Hau Giang, Minh Phung Streets.

The Rangers assaulted and swept clear all the VC positioned there, killing about 10 and capturing 4. The bridgehead set up the night before was at last destroyed.

At 11 o'clock, the enemy pressure decreased rapidly. They were driven to Bai Say area, Nam A Textile Plant, the Pottery and to the end of Pham Phu Thu Street.

The Operational Command Post of the 35th Ranger Battalion was located atop a building, N°239. Hau Giang Street for better view of the battle field. Present on the roof was Captain Dau, 35th Ranger Battalion assistant-commander directing the operation in progress.

From atop the building looking towards the Pottery area, Binh Tien Bridge connecting Binh Đong with Cholon was clearly seen with its curved frame. Two Rangers in firing position on the roof and armed with M. 79 grenade launchers aiming downwards were ready to cover by fire both ends of the bridge. From time to time, M. 79 grenades were launched into the opposite buildings through the windows for fear of hostile B. 40'S.

At the same time the Ranger advance guard continued to close with the enemy. Individual and crew served weapons were firing ceaselessly. Bullets crisscrossed and some flew in the wrong direction towards the building making hissing and whipping sounds. The NLF flag kept on flying over the Pottery area.

Requested artillery fire continued to pound regularly the Pottery area with two rounds at a time. Clouds of smoke and flames rose high in the sky following the explosions. At 1300 hours gunships came in to strike the area. The enemy held the far end of the bridge and our troops the near end. They all occupied dominating buildings. The gunships struck by mistake friendly positions.

At 1500 hours, the firing calmed down on both sides.

At 1600 hours the Major, commanding officer of the 35th Ranger Battalion,flew over the enemy battle area to observe and estimate the situation. His plane was fired at from the ground. The artillery kept on firing while the blaze continued to expand with huge columns of flames burning rows of houses 1 km long along the creek flowing under Renault Bridge. The city firemen had battled the fire since 1500 hours but remained impotent in face of the gigantic whirling columns of flames.

At 1900 hours the 3rd Ranger Company was ordered to cross Renault bridge. The enemy returned fire violently forcing the Rangers to pull back to the near end of the bridge. At 1920 hours they tried to assault for the second time while massing all fires on the opposite end of the bridge. This time they were successful.

Battalion Commander Ho Van Hoa ordered the NLF flag torn down 3 Rangers commanded by Aspirant Pham Minh Hoang carried out the mission.

Under the light of flares and flames of the burning houses, the 4 Rangers crept to the foot of the lamppost. One of them climbed up and was about to reach the flag when he was hit and fell down to the

ground. Friendly troops then opened fired intensely with automatic rifles at the buildings where enemy snipers were supposed to be shooting from. The flag pole was cut down by fire and the flag went down slowly with it.

After this action, the 3rd Ranger Company continued to advance deep into the enemy battle area, passing over barricades made of furniture of all sorts. The operational force encircled the Tan Binh Theater used by the enemy as a command post the night before. To seize this objective, the Rangers had to crawl over several roofs before reaching the side door of the theater.

The enemy opened fire and killed two of the attackers who at last had succeeded in penetrating into the building. The attackers were able to seize the building after engaging in a violent firefight for about one hour. The Rangers remained in the building on the defensive during the night.

The 4th Ranger Company, in particular, had relieved the pressure at the Binh Tay Distillery before 1100 hours without meeting any strong resistance.

On May 9th at 0830h., Captain Dau, the assistant battalion commander led two companies across Renault Bridge deep into Binh Tien, Nguyen Van Chi, Van Than Streets to keep the situation under control and to continue driving the enemy towards Cau Kinh Bridge. No more contact was made because enemy troops had withdrawn during the night. At 1030h. the operation was considered finished.

The first sight of the battlefield at Binh Tien revealed thousands of houses burned down, lampposts lying on the ground and furniture of all sorts spread all over the streets. The results of the battle were; 32 VC killed, 16 captured and a war trophy of 6 AK, 1 carbine and 1 pistol.

The battle of Tan Thoi Hiep

(From May 8th to May 11th, 1968)

In execution of the plan of attack on the Capital, on the night of May 8th and early morning of May 9th, the 101st Regiment, 9th VC Division intended to infiltrate into the city through Tan-Thoi-Hiep. This move was blunted by the 5th Airborne Battalion on the outskirts of the city.

About 0130h. in the morning, enemy troops moved close to the Airborne defensive line. At first, they attacked the 5th company

commanded by Captain Nguyen Van Đinh. Before opening up with small arms fire, they had bombarded this unit violently with five 82mm mortars. They assaulted 4 times but failed to break through the Airborne line, Captain Đinh disclosed that the enemy firepower was very powerful and consisted of machine guns, automatic rifles and also of B.40's By 7 o'clock in the morning the enemy withdrew. The 5th company rushed forward over the line to conduct a mop up operation 7 crew served and 17 individual weapons were captured. The 70 VC killed were left behind on the battlefield.

The 5th Airborne Battalion was reinforced with the 7th and the 1st Airborne Battalions to conduct a pursuit operation. The battle raged throughout the second day at Tan Thoi Hiep with the participation of tactical air and armored personnel carriers in support of friendly forces.

The battle was of such significance that if the Airborne defensive line had been broken through, the enemy could have penetrated through Xom Moi into the Capital along the same axis of advance they had used during Tet.

On the second day, 139 VC were killed, 5 were captured and 11 B.40, 6 heavy machine guns, 52 individual weapons of all kinds confiscated. On our side there were 21 killed and 52 wounded.

Major General Du Quoc Đong, the Airborne Division commander was always present on the battlefield and was eager to see all enemy units destroyed without leaving them any chance to escape.

General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff RVN Armed Forces also came to inspect the front while the battle was still raging. He observed the fighting in progress from the roof floor of the Thien Huong Glutamic Acid Factory only 500m from the frontline.

On the third day, the fighting took place around Giac Hoa Pagoda, 400m from the Glutamic Acid Factory where it was reported that the enemy had set up strong defensive positions.

Tactical aircraft, skyraiders and jet fighters F.105, dumped tons of bombs onto the targets. Following the air strikes infantrymen and armored personnel carriers in a combined action rushed forward onto the battlefield taking up position in the many ditches and open gardens. The surrounded enemy force still tried to resist in an attempt to fight its way out. But the encirclement ring was drawn tighter and tighter. On May 10th about nightfall the artillery

fired a smoke screen close to the enemy defensive line to cover the final assault wave. The final assault was driven back although enemy corpses were seen piled up on the edges of fox holes and trench slits.

At night, our troops kept on tightening the encircling ring. Armed AC 47's continued strafing and the artillery pounded the enemy positions regularly.

On May 11th by noon the battle actually came to an end. The total results showed that the Airborne units had killed 32 VC, captured 9 and taken 21 crew served and 96 individual weapons. The 5th Airborne Battalion lost 50 killed, 180 wounded and 1 missing in action. After 14 years of activation it was the first time the 5th Airborne Battalion had encountered a deserved foe namely, the 10th VC Regiment which was considered as "hors de combat" in their attempt to penetrate into the Capital.

The battle of Y bridge

(From May 9th to May 12th,1968)

A rather large enemy force had infiltrated into the southern area of Saigon and threatened Y-Bridge area to include Pham The Hien, Au Duong Lan Streets and the area of Khanh Hoi at the other end of Tan Thuan Bridge.

On the morning May 9th when the enemy made their appearance in the above areas, refugees from Khanh Hoi and the other end of Y-Bridge fled in throngs into the City. On Wednesday May 9th, US tanks moved to take positions at both ends of Tan Thuan Bridge. The road going down to Phu Xuan and Nha Be was still open to traffic. US tanks were also scattered in the Cau Hang area where many clashes took place on Wednesday starting many fires. On Ton That Thuyet Street along the canal the Marines of the 1st Marine Battalion held sentry posts along the street and also in the surrounding areas.

The situation on the other side of Y-Bridge (8th Precinct) by 1600 hours suddenly became critical. It appeared that the advance elements of the 2nd Phu Loi Battalion and the 5th Nha Be Battalion had infiltrated into the densely populated areas. They intended to cross Y-Bridge. A violent engagement occurred at the foot of Y-Bridge because it was the first time US forces participated in the fighting. With air support the US tanks followed by US infantrymen crossed the bridge at nightfall on May 9th. The VC had previously seized the huts close to the pier of the bridge to use as a foothold to cross the bridge.



Refugees huddled across Y bridge as fighting raged on morning May 9th, 1968



Fire at Pham The Hien Quay

These huts were hit with bombs and set on fire. The communists took cover in foxholes and ditches. To dig them out Allied Forces had to launch rockets and spray machine gun fire on them.

While the fighting was raging at this bridge many refugees caught in panic tried to cross the bridge which was their only way to get out of the battle area. They jostled one another and some were thrown into the barbed wire entanglements across the road way and were trampled by the fleeing crowd. It was estimated that approximately 100 refugees were either killed or injured while crossing the bridge. The dead were among those trampled by the crowd or caught in cross fires. The flocks of refugees moving in the streets while gunships were strafing low were also caught in the fire and many were killed. Many others running by mistake into VC firing positions were either hit by enemy fire or killed by gunships striking VC occupied houses. The Vietnamese troops then placed timber planks on the barbed wire for the refugees to step over.

It was recorded that loudspeakers from aircraft had warned the people to keep out of the strike zones but in this case of street fighting, they had to escape by crossing the bridge which was their only way to enter the city unless they were forced by the enemy to stay on the spot.

Before May 9th a combined VN-US force consisting of the 3rd Company of the 39th Battalion, 9th US Infantry Division with supporting tanks and the 2nd Company, 35th Ranger Battalion had set up a strong defensive perimeter to; protect Y-Bridge against enemy sabotage, to prevent the enemy from establishing a bridgehead across the bridge and also to secure the protection of the Cho Quan power plant which had been previously bombarded but sustained no damage.

The battle of Y-Bridge tapered off on May 10th. Clouds of smoke from fires kindled the day before still rose high into the sky. During the night, the enemy intended to seize the workhouse to release a number of hooligans detained there and to provide them with weapons as a means to have more reinforcements but the enemy plan failed.

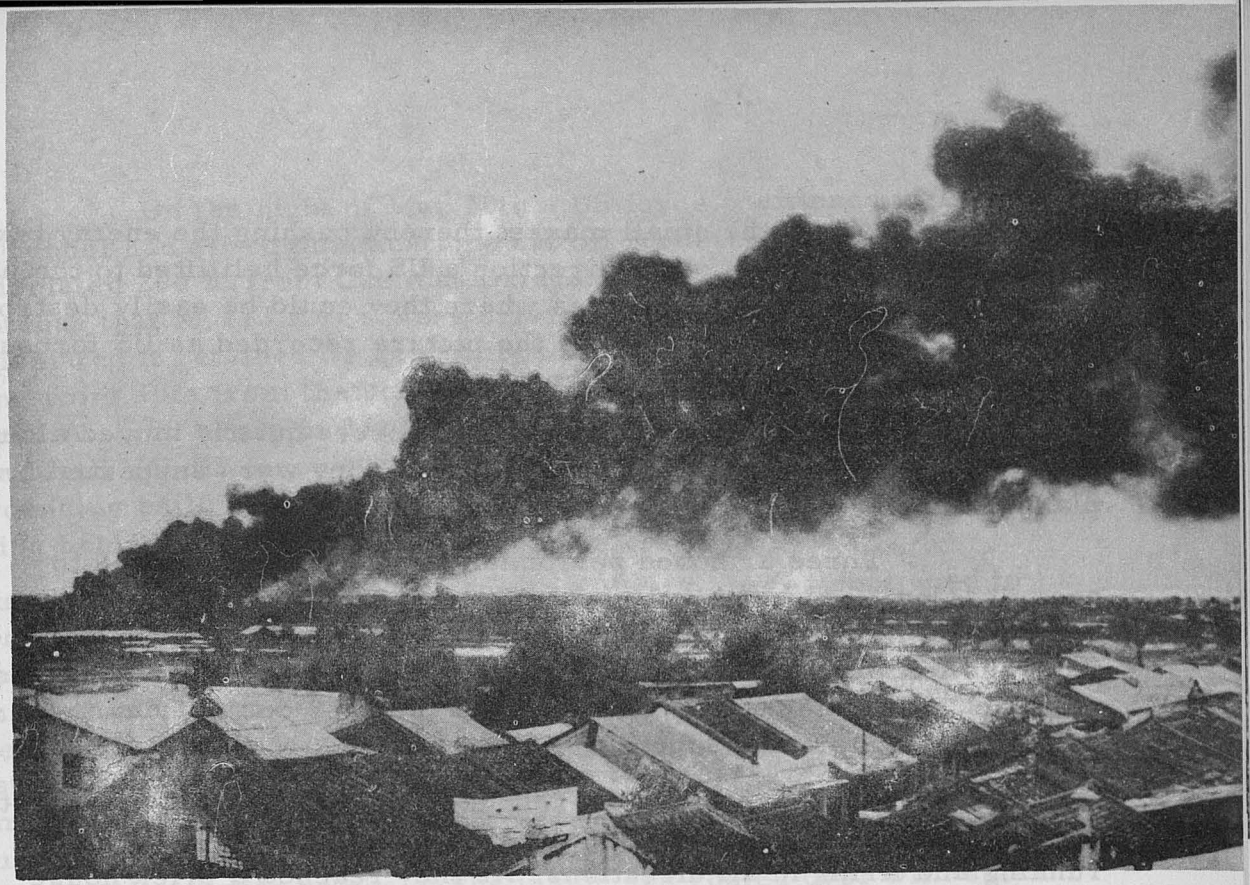
VN-US forces started to counterattack. From the direction of Y-Bridge a friendly column drove the enemy from Pham The Hien Street towards Cau Mat Bridge. The 3rd Company, 39th US Battalion supported by armored personnel carriers advanced deep into Pham The Hien Street. The 2nd Company, 35th Ranger Battalion also with supporting US armored personnel carriers advanced to seize the



US tanks committed for the first time in the fighting at Y bridge on May 9th, 1968.



Devastated scene at Pham The Hien market after the fighting.



Clouds of smoke from a blaze at Cau Mat bridge. Photo recorded from Au Duong Lan street on May 13th, 1968.



A quarter of Au Duong Lan street in ruins.

dirt road leading to the small market thereby pushing the enemy towards Cau Mat Bridge. In the other direction a US force helilifted to the paddies east of Y-Bridge into an area where they could be easily destroyed by air attacks. The following was the picture recorded as US forces advanced into Pham The Hien Street.

At 10 o'clock US operational forces quietly moved along Pham The Hien Street to reach the market. They were supported by planes dropping napalm bombs on the objective.

Three armored personnel carriers were ordered to assault. One M. 113 had just climbed over a high mound firing machine guns on the flank of the market when a B. 40 antitank grenade launched from the left hit the APC setting it on fire. The two other APC s had to pull back to their assault positions. The company commander then called the artillery for supporting fires.

At 1030 hours a US reconnaissance squad led by a first lieutenant bending low advanced towards the objective. They were running and firing in all directions. As they reached a brick house covered with iron sheets, the VC burst out through the doors, fired on the squad and then fled to another brick house. The doors of the 2nd house opened to let them in. Then all the VC ran out for an assault. They killed the American first lieutenant as he got close to them, the officer had thrown 2 grenades wounding some of the VC before he was hit.

At 11 o'clock dark columns of smoke rose from Pham The Hien, Au Duong Lam Streets and the bank of Rach Ong Creek. Thousands of houses on Pham The Hien Street were burned down while many people were still confined in the area.

At 1300 hours many helicopters flew in to supply friendly troops with ammunition and food. US forces continued to channel enemy troops into target areas vulnerable to air strikes. The 3rd Brigade, 9th US Infantry Division commanded by Colonel George Benson also took part in this battle. Moreover, in addition to the forces fighting in the city, 1 US battalion supported by armor also conducted a search operation in the area southwest of Y-Bridge. This unit had contact with an enemy force which was on the way to reinforce the VC operating in the city.

The battle on May 11th lasted for 10 hours from 1350 hours to 2350 hours causing the enemy 85 killed. On the US side were 4 killed and 24 wounded.

On the night of May 10th a US force positioned in Lasan High School had all communications cut off from the command post and was isolated 200 m from Cau Mat Bridge. The enemy firepower was so intense that M. 113 APCs were driven back. But although the force was isolated it retained its capability to fight back. The enemy from a strong point 30m from the school directed all its weapons on the Americans. At 1700 hours on May 11th the isolated force was relieved by a combined VN-US force supported by APCs. All enemy positions in the surrounding buildings had been destroyed by airstrikes. The VC withdrew leaving behind 98 dead.

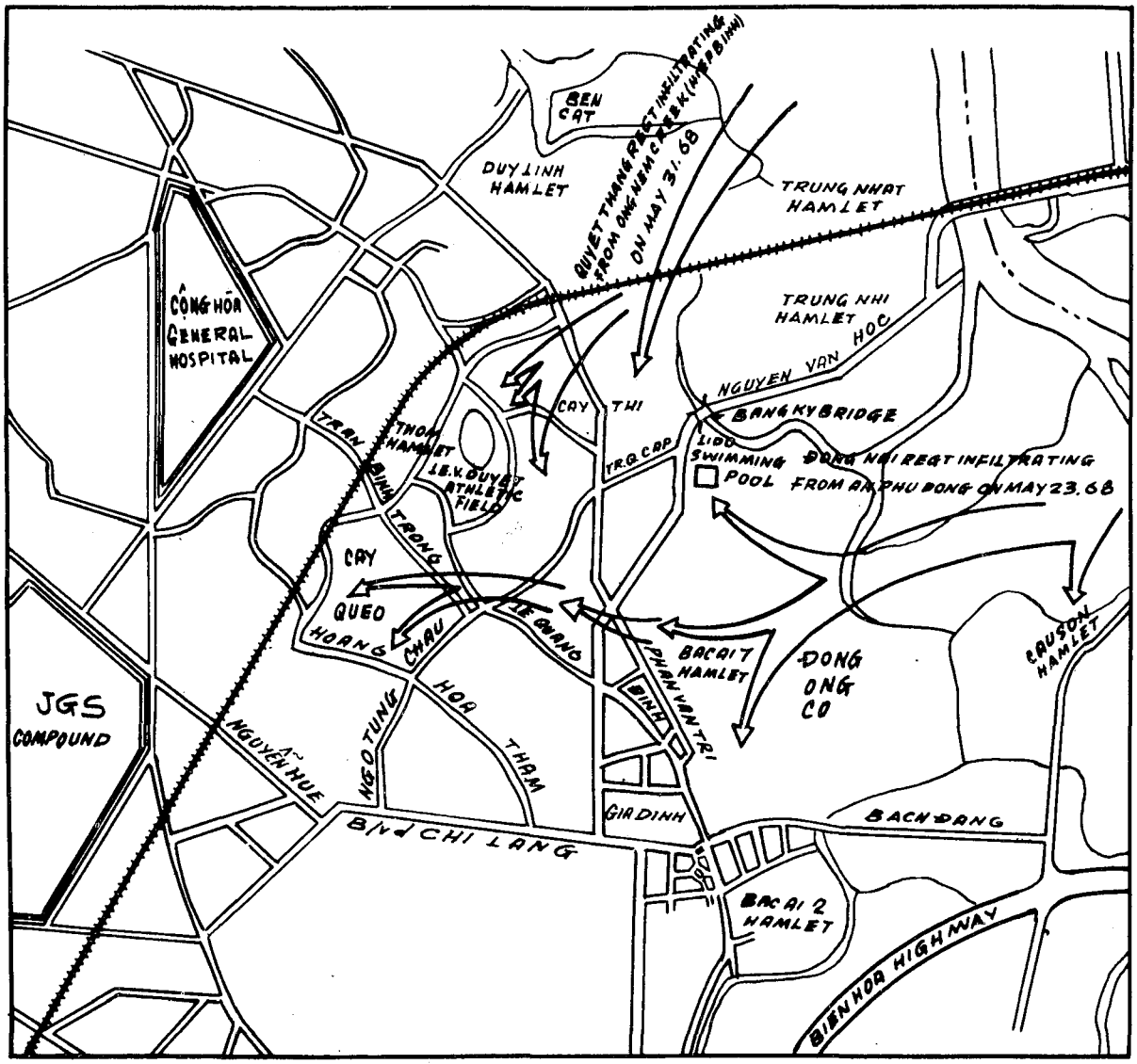
On May 11th in the daytime VN-US forces continued to mop up the area of operations. In addition to the relief operation around Lasan High School, friendly troops still continued to search Pham The Hien, Au Duong Lan Streets. The battle was indecisive. In spite of violent air strikes in support of advancing allied forces scattered AK bursts of fire were still heard. When the tanks were within range the enemy launched deadly B. 40 grenades. The enemy strove to hold their ground by digging themselves in. Fortified dug-outs 2m from each other were lined with bricks on the inside and roofed over with sofas covered with mud and leaves for camouflage.

On the morning of May 12th the battle calmed down. US forces were in charge of the cordon while the 35th Ranger Battalion and the Police Field Force moved into Au Duong Thanh Street for a search. At only 50m from the street, a sickening odor was encountered. The accompanying firemen had to pull VC corpses out of debris. At noon friendly forces had the whole area under control. All remaining VC had taken advantage of darkness on the night of May 11th to escape.

The damage caused to the people rose to more than 8000 houses destroyed. Over 400 Communists were killed in this area of operations along with 120 weapons of all kinds captured.

VC SECOND WAVE OF ATTACKS

(From May 25 to June 18-68)



Durations of operations :

- Operations throughout Gia-Dinh	From 25 May 68 to 27 May 68
- Battle at Tap Thanh Pagoda	From 23 May 68 to 5 June 68
- Battle at Bang Ky Bridge	From 31 May 68 to 3 June 68
- Battle at Xom Thom	From 4 June 68 to 7 June 68
- Battle at Cay Queo	From 5 June 68 to 11 June 68
- Battle at Cay Thi	From 11 June 68 to 18 June 68

The battle north of the Capital

(From May 25th to June 18th, 1968)

This battle actually started on the night of May 23rd but only on May 25th did it really break out.

Since the night of May 25th the enemy had stealthily infiltrated into Hamlet 7 in Gia Dinh. They did not fire a shot. The operation Sector Police force had contact with them when they reached Long Van and Tap Thanh Pagodas. There was an exchange of fire. As a result, 4 policemen were killed including 1 first lieutenant.

On the morning of May 24th the population in the province was in alarm. Due to the police cordon to search for hidden enemy troops Gia Dinh market was closed. Le Quang Dinh street from Bach Dang intersection to Binh Hoa intersection was also closed to traffic. Many refugees from Hamlet 7 took shelter in Gia Dinh market. At 0900 hours on May 24th another firefight took place in the above areas. The enemy was widely dispersed and hid in the houses in vicinity of the pagoda.

The flow of refugees when they got close to Cau Bong Bridge, Le Van Duyet Street burst into the ground of the Tuberculosis Hospital or lingered near Gia Dinh Information Office.

It was reported that in Hiep Binh Hamlet on the bank of the Saigon River there were indications of a concentration of enemy troops consisting of the VC Dong Nai Regiment which intended to penetrate into the Capital by crossing the river.

On May 24th in the afternoon, the crowd of refugees emerging from Tap Thanh Pagoda grew larger and larger. People of all ages and sexes huddled together trying to cross a lane which was then the "No Man's Land" separating the friendly and enemy controlled areas.

At Dong Ong Co no contact with the enemy was made when friendly troops began to search the area. It appeared that the few scattered VC cells had escaped secretly through the cordon ring.

How strong were these cells and when had they infiltrated ? According to Lieutenant Colonel Hoang Thong, Marine "Group A" Commander, the enemy departing from An Phu Dong had

infiltrated under the cover of darkness through the gap between two outposts on the fringe of the Capital.

Prisoners of war interrogation reports also confirmed that the K. 3 Phu Loi Battalion was the first infiltrated unit. On May 25th in the afternoon Gia Dinh Police Force had another clash with the enemy in the vicinity of Quan Tam Pagoda near Cay Queo Hamlet, Hoang Hoa Tham Street.

Then on Saturday at midnight until Sunday early morning the enemy really made their appearance in the battle area. They seized many places such as the quadrangle limited by Nguyen Van Hoc, Le Quang Dinh, Ngo Tung Chau, Chi Lang Streets and the Lido Swimming Pool area. They broke into houses, shot at military personnel and civilians suspected as civil servants and everything moving on the streets on early Sunday morning.

The Marine "Group A" conducted immediate reaction operations. A Marine force moved into the Mortuary Lane behind Nguyen Van Hoc Hospital. Another column departing from Binh Hoa Road Junction to seize the Lido Swimming Pool and the Trung Thanh Restaurant where an estimated VC Company held scattered defensive positions with antiaircraft weapons and mortars.

Another column departing from Le Quang Dinh, Ngo Tung Chau Streets moved to seize the crossroads between Tran Quy Cap, Phan Van Tri, Le Quang Dinh, Ngo Tung Chau Streets. Enemy troops were dispersed into scattered combat cells positioned in high buildings to contain the advance of our attacking forces. As they reached the corner of Hoang Hoa Tham and Ngo Tung Chau Streets, a clash flared.

The friendly rear element blocking to the North on the Gia Dinh - Go Vap boundary also had scattered engagements.

After an entire day of hard fighting the Marines had killed 8 VC, captured 1 heavy machinegun and 2 AK's at Cay Thi Road Junction and the Lido Swimming Pool. The Marines had failed to drive the enemy out of this area because enemy troops had fought from fortified defensive positions organized in the people's houses. In other areas as soon as we seized one quarter of the street the VC would withdraw to another one. At the Mortuary Lane behind Nguyen Van Hoc Hospital when we tightened the encirclement the enemy moved to hold positions in Le Quang Dinh Street in vicinity of Duoc Su



Enemy troops fought to death from defensive positions organized on dangerous terrain with dense vegetation, houses built close together mixed up with tombs and graves. Photo shows friendly troops firing from behind tombs.



Paratroopers of the 5th Airborne Battalion in firing positions at a cemetery.

Pagoda. The fighting in the streets lasted for 13 hours but began to slowdown at 1900 hours. Our troops then took positions at various points to bar all enemy routes of approach.

Gia Dinh Sector announced an around the clock curfew

At night the enemy shelled the 816th Police Field Force Special Group in Gia Dinh causing the death of two policemen while wounding ten others.

On May 27th our forces expelled the enemy from the quadrangle limited by Nguyen Van Hoc, Le Quang Dinh, Hoang Hoa Tham and Ngo Tung Chau Streets. Security was completely restored in this area.

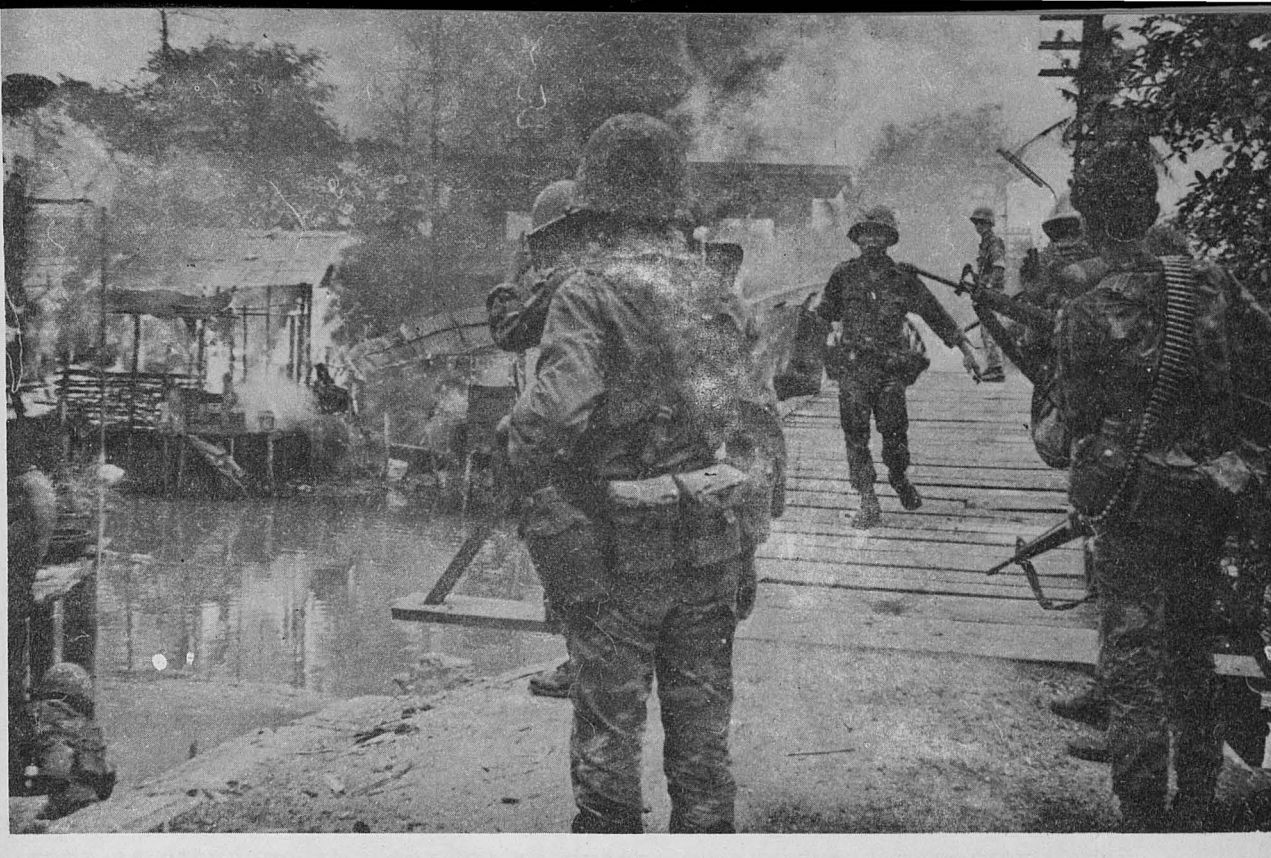
The enemy gradually withdrew from Quan Tam Pagoda, Cay Queo, Xom Ga Hamlets to move to newly prepared defensive positions at Cay Thi, Bang Ky Bridge, Lo Voi Hamlet, Dong Ong Co and Hang Xanh Street. On May 27th in the afternoon loudspeakers of Gia Dinh Sector called for all refugees from Nguyen Van Hoc Housing Quarter, Quan Tam Pagoda Hamlet, Cay Queo, a quarter of Xom Ga Hamlet as far as Binh Hoa Crossroads to return to their homes because the situation was returning to normal.

On May 27th friendly troops had only one violent clash with the enemy positioned in a house close to Quan Tam Pagoda (Hoang Hoa Tham Street). The fighting went on until nightfall and touched off a small fire. All the 16 enemy defenders lay dead in their position. We captured 1 heavy machine gun and 4 AK.47s . On our side 2 were killed and 11 were wounded.

On May 28th the Marines pursued their operations in the area of Cay Thi, Bang Ky Bridge and Lo Voi Hamlet. Gunships had strafed these areas to prepare for the ground attack which lasted for many hours and set many houses afire.

Under the pressure of the Marines the enemy from Lo Voi withdrew to the area southeast of the Lido Swimming Pool. Another enemy group still lingered northwest of Bang Ky Bridge in an area thickly covered with trees. To avoid causing damage to civilian properties our troops were very cautious in the employment of air and artillery support.

On May 28th our operational forces consisting of the 1st Marine Battalion commanded by Major Phan Van Thang and the



Operation at Cau Moi (New bridge) area in vicinity of Long Van Pagoda (Gia Dinh) on May 28th 1968.



Scene of area in vicinity of Bang Ky Bridge. Thuan Loi timber plant in ruins.

6th Marine Battalion commanded by Major Nguyen Xuan Phuc were assigned missions as follows :

- 1 Company of 1st Marine Battalion to search Lo Voi area.
- 1 Company of the Marine Battalion positioned at Cay Thi Road Junction along Phan Van Tri Street.
- 1 Company of the Marine Battalion to block Bang Ky Bridge thereby cutting off all contact between two enemy forces.
- Another Company of the Marine Battalion to search the roadsides of Nguyen Van Hoc Street.
- The 6th Marine Battalion to block to the southeast of Binh Loi Bridge.
- Gia Dinh Police Field Force to block all avenues of approach into the city Streets.

The population in Gia Dinh had learned experiences from the previous VC attacks so everybody got ready to evacuate as soon as the presence of the enemy was announced.

On May 29th isolated hidden enemy troops were still in action. The situation that appeared to calm down suddenly became critical again.

On the night of May 30th and early on the morning of May 31st the enemy sent more troops from Rach Ong Nen area by crossing the railroad to get close to Bang Ky Bridge. It was estimated that 2 enemy battalions had succeeded in making the penetration. Subsequently, the tactical situation on the following day deteriorated.

When the Marines moved back to the railroad for an attack on the flank of the enemy force communist sappers had destroyed the fuel pipeline to the west of Go Vap. They then ignited the broken line in order to spread panic among the population and to cover the movement of more troops into Bang Ky area.

Later during the night the Marines repelled a heavy enemy attack against their defensive line. The VC regimental commander whose name was Ba Vinh was killed in this action. On our side only one Marine outpost was overrun but was quickly recaptured. The 6 defenders of this outpost were wounded.

When our troops conducted an operation behind the Duc Lam sawmill a violent clash broke out. The enemy fought from hastily



The VC were hiding in populated areas Lo Voi - Dong Ong Co - area behind the Cancer Institute, Minh Tanh monastery... The Marines were advancing cautiously into a lane where enemy troops-hiding. Photo recorded on May 26th, 1968.



Friendly troops advancing into Minh Tanh Monastery.

prepared positions. At 0745 hours gunships conducted a strike. Rockets were launched onto the targets while M. 79 grenades were detonating regularly as the beats of a drum.

The battlefield was not far from Bang Ky Bridge where two tanks were pointing their guns toward the battle area along with a small rifle unit. At 0945 hours a helicopter was shot down by enemy ground fire in Dong Ong Co. The aircraft and its crew members were quickly rescued.

At 1050 hours the enemy was driven out of the sawmill. The fighting then spread to the leather tanning plant and the fertilizer factory in the vicinity of Binh Loi Bridge.

The Marines set up a bridgehead in a house close to the fertilizer factory. This outpost encountered very strong enemy pressure but was ordered to hold ground at any cost. Our forces were divided into many columns to attack from different directions. Close air support aircraft flew over the objective and dropped heavy bombs shaking the entire area of Gia Dinh.

Another enemy group intensified their activities in a quarter of Nguyen Van Thanh Street 500m from Binh Hoa Road Intersection. Long Van and Tap Thanh Pagodas were situated in this area where there was also access routes to Dong Ong Co, Cau Son and Hang Xanh Streets. It was reported from prisoner of war sources that the enemy had infiltrated through Rach Ong Nen across the railroad into Gia Dinh during the early days of the battle.

At 1000 hours the 5th Airborne Battalion under the command of Major Vy came to reinforce in two columns.

On June 1st the battle at Bang Ky Bridge spread over 3 areas :

- Dong Nhi Hamlet (400m from Bang Ky Bridge)
- Garbage Service area (in vicinity of Cay Thi Road Junction).
- Trung Nhat Hamlet (East of POL, Ammunition Depots in Go Vap)

On the night of June 1st the enemy continued to expand mainly into the Garbage Service area in spite of 400 rounds of artillery fired into the area.

The Marines conducted an operation into the Garbage Service area on the following day. The enemy firepower was so intense that our tanks were only able to penetrate into the objective after 3 consecutive assaults. At 10 o'clock the situation was under control. We captured 3 VC, killed 45 and took possession of 9 AK, 6 B.40, and 1 B.41.

After a successful fire fight at Dong Nhi Hamlet many weapons were captured. The encircled enemy pretended to surrender. We called for them to come out with loudspeakers but they held the positions. After repeated calls without results, air strikes against the objective resumed at 1230 hours.

A unit of 6th Marine Battalion supported by tanks advanced into Trung Nhat Hamlet.

At 1230hours Lieutenant Colonel Hoang Thong announced that the enemy force was considered destroyed. The remaining task for the Marines was to mop up fleeing disbanded, disillusion and disorganized enemy troops.

On the night of June 1st and early on the morning of June 2nd the enemy force was unexpectedly found to have been reinforced and capable of launching a thrust aimed at the tactical command post of the Marine "Group A". The attack that came was turned back. On the morning of June 2nd the Marine "Group A" conducted a sweep in the area, maneuvering with the 6th Marine Battalion in two columns departing from Binh Loi Bridge. The second column during their advance met violent resistance 1 km from Bang Ky Bridge and 900m from the line of departure. The enemy withdrew leaving behind 11 dead, 2 AKs and 1 B.41. In this engagement 5 rows of buildings of the fertilizer plant were burned down.

The 1st and the 6th Marine Battalions swept the area northeast of Gia Dinh in two columns with the support of air and artillery. During the 3 consecutive days of operations the Marines had killed a total of 531 VC captured about 100 weapons of all kinds mostly AKs, B.40s and B.41s.

One June 3rd the battle to the northeast was temporarily calm in the Marine zone of action where all remaining enemy troops around Binh Loi Bridge and Bang Ky Bridge had been killed or captured In this area only a search operation was still in progress aimed at capturing hidden enemy elements and weapons.

In the 5th Airborne Battalion zone of action, at Tap Thanh Pagoda, big fires were still seen with huge columns of smoke and flames. The paratroopers had to revert to the tactic of moving to the objective by creeping, jumping and climbing over rows of houses to avoid enemy fires sweeping the open streets. Only after they reached the surrounding area of the pagoda did they make contact with the enemy.

This built-up area thickly covered with trees offered vantage ground to the enemy. The paratroopers did not request artillery or air support because they were afraid of causing more casualties among the people.

At night the enemy received more reinforcements and intended to take advantage of darkness to penetrate in small groups into Saigon through Cau Moi Bridge. Ten of the members of these groups were killed during their infiltration attempt.

To deal with such enemy reinforcement tactics and critical terrain features which favored the defenders the paratroopers had to call for artillery and air support. At 11 o'clock on 4 June the skyraiders truck the enemy violently. Following the air attack two Airborne Companies moved to break through the enemy defensive line but were stopped about 50m from the line of departure.

As in the previous night the enemy attempted to escape but their efforts were in vain and they lost 3 men killed in their attempt.

According to Captain Tran Van Son, a staff officer, the main intention of the enemy was to make every effort to sneak to the south i. e. to push a deep thrust into Gia Dinh. A prisoner of war revealed that his commanding officer told him Saigon had fallen into their hands. His unit was assigned the mission to relieve their victorious comrades in the city. To explain why they had been barred by the paratroopers on their infiltration route their commander said that these were but small groups of opposition forces. The same prisoner also disclosed that the committed enemy unit was Battalion K. 3 of the Dong Nai Regiment and that 2 other battalions were still in this area.

On the morning of June 2nd three flights of fighters dropped ordnance on the area around Tap Thanh Pagoda. Large bombs shook the earth. Immediately following the bombing attack the para-

troopers renewed their assault but were still pinned down due to the enemy intense fire. The 51st Airborne Company commanded by Captain Quan assaulted 3 times but was turned back each time by intense enemy firepower.

Throughout the past 8 days the enemy had stubbornly resisted in this area, taking advantage of the abundant obstacles such as thick bamboo hedges, dense foliage and closely built houses. Moreover, they had built fortified dugouts. Therefore, defenders as well as attackers had to be on the lookout because if they exposed themselves they could be shot at instantly. As our troops were not able to advance artillery and air support were again requested. Artillery shells exploded only 50m in front of the friendly line. During the past 18 hours 16 flights of air support over the objective had been recorded.

After 10 days the fighting was still raging in this area. Our troops were only able to inch a few hundred meters forward each day. As they advanced they continued to meet with more heavily defended dugin positions. Moreover, this area had once been a cemetery, and 50 tombs and graves were found even in front of houses. Our troops continued to trade fire with the enemy while artillery and aircraft continued to support the battle. Their going was very slow mostly from house to house.

On the morning of June 4th at 0210 hours a unit of the Tran Hung Dao group had contact with the enemy at Xom Thom in the vicinity of the Joint General Staff compound. This seemed to indicate that the enemy was still trying to penetrate deep into the city. They intended to take advantage by sneaking through some gaps in the defensive lines, but they were unexpectedly intercepted at Xom Thom. About daybreak one Regional Force squad had a violent clash with an estimated VC company at lane 209, Ngo Tung Chau Street about 30m from Cay Queo Market. The RF squad pulled back into a high building and fought from there until bright daylight when reinforcements came to relieve them.

The 86th Regional Force Battalion had sent a few days before a squad to be positioned in a high building (No 54, Ngo Tung Chau street). The enemy troops were fresh reinforcements and unaware of the current situation so they had moved to the above lane with the intent of reaching Quan Tam Pagoda by crossing Ngo Tung Chau street. Their appearance was first revealed by Sergeant Hai, the squad leader who fired 1 round of M. 79 in the middle of the enemy

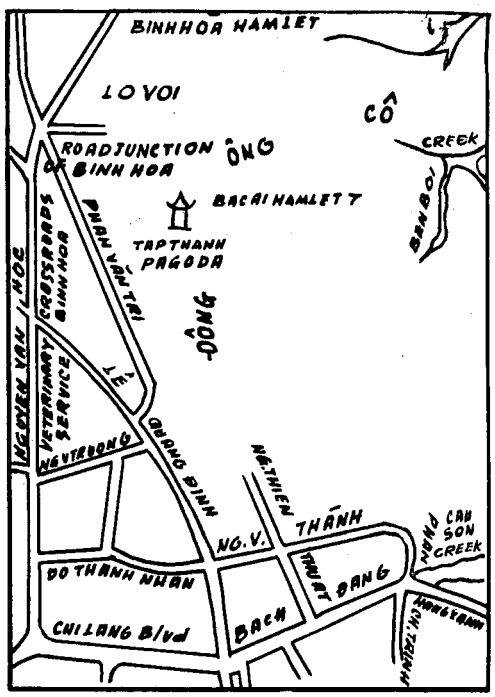


Chart of battle area at Tap Thanh pagoda Dong Ong Co

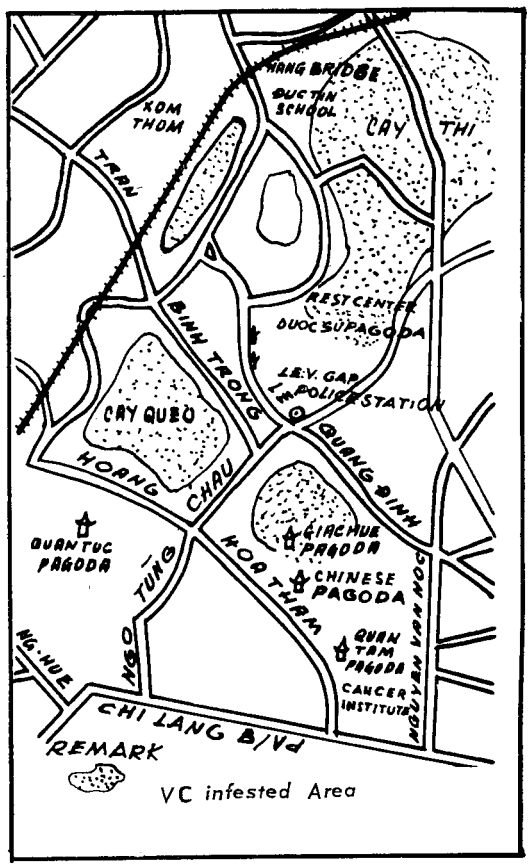


Chart of battle area "Cay Queo – Cay Thi"

troops, causing them to break up and spread to both sides of the street. They returned fire with AKs and B.40s then surrounded the building. The 86th RF battalion supported at maximum range with mortar fire. At daylight friendly reinforcements arrived meeting no resistance. Thousands of refugees huddled again into Ngo Tung Chau street.

On the morning of June 4th one enemy platoon was seen as they crossed Le Quang Dinh street to reach the area behind Dai Dong theater. While they were rushing out onto the street they were met by the policemen from Nguyen Van Gap Police Station. In this close fire fight 3 VC were killed and they fell with their 3 AKs by the roadside. The policemen were not able to retrieve these weapons due to the intense enemy fire.

The civilian population once again left the area in haste moving in the direction of Giac Hôa Pagoda. Loudspeakers announced that an around the clock curfew was in effect in this area.

The Marines took part in the fighting to aid the mission of the paratroopers in the Cay Queo battle area. This seemed to indicate that the battle was nearing a decisive stage.

Napalm bombs were used. The axis of advance was suddenly switched to an envelopment to the flank by a combined Marine paratrooper force from west to east contrary to the axis from south to north usually followed on the previous days.

Mixed with explosions of bombs were scattered detonations of small arms and grenades. Captain Son of the 5th Airborne Battalion said that the enemy usually got as close to our frontline as possible to escape from being hit by air strikes.

Friendly troops advanced with extreme difficulty from morning until afternoon. The battle around Tap Thanh pagoda came to an end as the Marines seized the pagoda at 1730 hours after 13 days of fighting. However, the paratroopers continued to conduct a search around Tap Thanh Pagoda within their zone of action.

In this operation the paratroopers killed 8 VC, captured 5 and collected 10 weapons of all kinds. The Marines killed 24, captured 24 and collected a booty of 13 AKs, 3 B.40s and B.41.

On the following days a combined Airborne - Marine

force conducted a search in this area which was considered as secured. The paratroopers discovered a mass grave containing 56 VC corpses and had to clean up the area by removing all corpses for fear that the odor and conditions might scare away the refugees.

The total results after the battle showed approximately 100 VC killed and 8 captured with 5 AKs, 1 B.40, 1 B.41, 1 M.79 and 1 Chicom pistol confiscated. On our side, only 1 NCO was killed.

We had won this battle thanks to our disposition of troops which had blocked all enemy avenues of approach into the defensive area of the Joint General Staff Headquarters units. While enemy troops were on their way to infiltrate into the area they were challenged by an NCO on guard. They opened fire and killed the sentry. They intended to storm into the command post of a company positioned on the defensive line. Our troops then reacted in time and instantly destroyed the enemy point consisting of 5 VC. In the morning the 9th Airborne Battalion came to reinforce and conduct a search and destroy operation.

Commanded by Major Nha, the battalion was divided into different columns advancing as far as the railroad. While crossing the cemetery many bursts of AK were shot therefrom and lightly wounded 3 paratroopers. The enemy used the tombs as vantage points. Therefore, the fighting could not be ended promptly.

The 9th Airborne Battalion was assigned to search the quadrangle limited by Ngo Tung Chau, Hoang Hoa Tham and Le Quang Dinh streets. Other forces from the Joint General Staff compound held blocking positions all around.

The battalion found it difficult and time consuming but necessary to search and destroy one nest of resistance after another. 3 VC would man a position set up in a house or in a pagoda which they could fire from as snipers. Houses in this area were disposed without any plan and stood close together with dominating buildings here and there which offered vantage positions to the snipers. The capabilities of the airborne unit were not used to the maximum for fear of causing great damage to the people.

Throughout the morning of June 5th the paratroopers in constant search for the enemy were only able to kill 2 VC, capture 1 and collect 2 AKs and 1 B.40. The battalion swept up from south - north driving the enemy out of high buildings. The repelled VC then joined those positioned in Truc Lam Pagoda. Also in this morning,

the battalion divided the zone of action into 4 areas A, B, C and D. A and B areas were 120m from Ngo Tung Chau Street and were cleared.

On the morning of June 6th the paratroopers continued to sweep objective C where Truc Lam Pagoda was situated. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon the fighting in Cay Thi area suddenly increased in intensity. The VC from their positions around Linh Son and Truc Lam Pagodas opened up with 57mm recoilless rifle and B.40 fire. Also from behind thick bamboo hedges enemy automatic weapons poured out deadly bursts of fire. Many paratroopers fell dead and the objective still remained untaken.

The 9th company commanded by Lieutenant Tan assaulted the objective 3 times but was driven back by heavy machine gun fire each time. It was the first time in this battle that 90mm guns and 81mm mortars had been used. Artillery and mortar shells unceasingly pounded the enemy positions, digging up hedges of bamboo by the roots which fell onto the heads of the advancing troops. Following the barrage of about 1000 artillery and mortar rounds, the paratroopers assaulted and were able to seize the objective at last.

On the morning of June 7th to reoccupy Linh Son Pagoda the paratroopers crossed the prolonged portion of Hoang Hoa Tham Street which had been closed by the enemy for 3 consecutive days. In this area trees were scorched, bamboo hedges uprooted, tombs devastated with large stains of blood everywhere and stinky odors emitting from debris. There were about 30 dugouts with well built entrance hatches, thick timbers over the roofs reinforced with furniture and clothes and on top a layer of earth. Many shells had hit these emplacements without causing significant destruction. Most of them were built in a U-shape with 2 parallel vertical hatches through which the defenders could fire at the attackers. Our troops also discovered 5 AKs and a mass in which corpses were decomposing.

The battle at Cay Queo was really fantastic. The enemy when destroyed in one position would appear in another.

On June 7th the presence of the enemy was reported again in many places in Gia Dinh such as in Giac Hoa Pagoda area, Cay Thi Road Junction and behind the Lido swimming pool. This appearance was an indication of another battle to take place soon.

After 4 consecutive days of hard fighting in the quadrangle Ngo Tung Chau, Hoang Hoa Tham, Le Quang Dinh streets and in

the operations to expel the enemy from Truc Lam, Linh Son Pagodas and the Bonze Rest Center, the 9th Airborne Battalion had to halt their advance and give way to the 81st Airborne Ranger Battalion which had to sweep the remaining portion of the zone of action at Duc Tin school. This unit had just moved from Nhatrang and was commanded by Major Que. The appearance of the airborne rangers meant that there had been a change in street fighting tactics to avoid damages caused to the people. Prior to their attack, they used limited support of heavy weapons but crept and rolled into the battle area to search and destroy the enemy because they were expert in close combat.

Joining the battle on the morning of June 8th, the 81st Airborne Ranger Battalion departing from the Bonze Rest Center mounted a probing attack on enemy positions in the vicinity of Duc Tin school.

The 1st company was the advance guard. Two pointmen Nguyen Linh Kiet and Ngo Van Hoa were killed by bursts of AR fire while they were moving forward on a reconnaissance. 106mm recoilless rifles were also used to support the advancing elements. By 1400 hours after finding the exact enemy positions the airborne rangers suspended all reconnaissance missions and surrounded the objective blocking all avenues of approach.

At 1900 hours the airborne rangers started the attack by opening up with all kinds of weapons fire on the objective. 60mm mortars pounded regularly every 5 seconds. M. 79 fired in salvos of 8 rounds at a time.

The firing continued for 2 consecutive hours.

All at once, all fires were lifted. So were enemy fires. In the dim light of a nearly full moon overcast by the clouds, the battlefield was shrouded in gunsmoke.

During this lull, 15 Airborne Ranger and Delta teams quietly moved on the attack, without field packs, encumbrant equipment, but carrying their individual weapons and 10 grenades. They crept silently into the objective in cells of three crawling like lizards from every direction.

About 10m from the enemy defensive positions they all jumped up together and attacked with grenades. The enemy in confusion reacted with B.40 fire but these anti tank grenades used against personnel were not as effective as hand grenades. The enemy front line was

breached. The airborne rangers and the Delta Teams then closed with the enemy in close combat. A number of VC were killed, some remained confined in dug outs and others were split into 2 groups to fight and fired a bloody way out. At daybreak the objective was completely under control.

21 dead VC were left on the objective and 1 VC was captured. On our side, 9 airborne rangers died for the service of their country. The prisoner of war confessed that he was of the 1st battalion, Dong Nai Regiment infiltrated 3 days before.

This was the first night raid ever conducted in the operations on the fringe of the Capital.

After seizing the objective area around Duc Tin school the airborne rangers and Delta Teams controlled only one part of the zone of action 150m deep from Hoang Hoa Tham street to Le Quang Dinh street. It appeared that more enemy reinforcements were being brought in. Unexpectedly 2 Airborne Ranger companies positioned in the Bonze Rest Center were encircled by the enemy troops coming in from the northwest. Initially, at 1300 hours, the enemy opened fire from 2 high buildings, a garden thickly covered with trees slightly opposite the gate and from the flank of the pagoda to harass our troops. Lieutenant Binh then split his force into 2 elements. One from the opposite building opened fire on enemy positions while the other one maneuvered directly from a corner of the pagoda towards the slightly opposite building. The VC in the second building on the flank of the pagoda joined those in the garden firing on our maneuvering element. Lieutenant Binh sent a third element from the corner to the north of the pagoda to launch a frontal attack on the garden. At the same time, the first column stormed into the building opposite the pagoda. The VC were driven out leaving behind 6 dead. The remaining VC fled into the building on the flank of the pagoda.

The element attacking the garden was held off by 2 B.40s positioned behind a tree. The airborne rangers launched 3.5 rockets killing the 3 gunners on the spot. When they moved to capture the B.40's, they found that these VC were chained together by the hands.

As to the building on the flank of the pagoda, 90mm guns were used to blow open the wall for the troops who had previously seized the opposite building to assault through. The enemy fled to the other side of Tran Binh Trong street leaving behind in the battle

area a total of 25 dead. One group of riflemen then moved close to the above street. The enemy set up in haste one heavy machine gun on a log laden truck parked on the street and poured intense fire on the advancing element who had to halt for cover. Lieutenant Binh carrying an M. 72 moved forward and began to climb to a position on a multistoried house. He was spotted while taking cover behind a wall. The enemy fired a burst at the cracked wall braking off fragments of concrete which flew all over, but the officer was unhurt. A short time later he succeeded in reaching the high part of the house and from there launched a rocket at the log truck. The heavy machine gun was hit and thrown into the enemy position below. Its gunner and assistant gunner were killed.

The riflemen then moved forward throwing grenades into the enemy positions close to the wall. But they did not cross to the other side of the street because this was part of the Marines' zone of action.

In the paratroopers' battle area, the 52nd company supported by four M41 tanks kept blocking positions within the quadrangle Le Quang Dinh, Tran Binh Trong, Ngo Tung Chau and the boundary of Xom Thom (Pineapple Hamlet)

On the afternoon of June 9th, pushed from southwest by the units of the 9th Airborne Battalion into the prongs of blocking forces, the enemy massed all fires on the 52/2 company in an attempt to break through the assailants for a bloody escape route towards Bang Ky Bridge. The enemy fire was most intense at 2020 hours. The point of the mauled force was found at times 15m or 20m from our advancing elements in Tran Binh Trong street.

But when the enemy realized that they had failed to make the break through, they moved towards Xom Thom Hamlet.

As of 2000 hours, enemy firing died away.

On the morning of June 10th more reinforcements came into the quadrangle for a search. At noon the situation to the west and southwest quieted but to the east the enemy pressure was still high. The Marines had to attack from Bang Ky Bridge to push the enemy to the south. Also on this morning the enemy set fire to a few houses behind Duoc Su Pagoda probably to cover their escape.

Also on the morning of June 10th the 3rd Airborne Ranger company commanded by Lieutenant Ngo Tuong Lam moved into

the quadrangle. Only light scattered fire fights with isolated VC cells took place. They fired some rounds at the Rangers then fled away taking advantage of the thick vegetation.

The enemy withdrew so hastily that they left open a battle area they had organized in advance for further actions. This area was approximately 10,000 square meters covered with banana trees growing as thick as a jungle along with high grass and bamboo. The enemy had built there 50 combat dugouts. Each of these had two entrance hatches opening into 2 shelters : one inside and one outside in the same way as those found around Linh Son Pagoda where a fighting between the enemy and the 94/5 Airborne company had occurred on June 7th. With such vantage terrain features and such careful preparations, why had the enemy withdrawn so hastily ? That could probably be attributed to their heavy losses or to their fear to fight against the airborne rangers and Delta teams who had inflicted humiliating defeats on them through formidable night attack tactics.

On June 10th the 91st and the 92nd companies of the 9th Airborne battalion had to reoccupy the Bonze Rest Center because when our troops had left for operations elsewhere, the undefended center was open to enemy infiltration. The paratroopers had to fight in close quarters and used M. 72's to reduce the fortified positions. Only after hours of bloody fighting did this center fall into their hands.

The battle of Cay Queo in the quadrangle bounded by Le Quang Dinh, Tran Binh Trong, Ngo Tung Chau streets and Xom Thom was considered closed since June 11th following the seizure of the above rest center.

But on June 12th, at noon, the Marines had violent contact again with the enemy in Bac Ai Hamlet 10, Cay Thi area. The first unit having contact was the 1st Co, 1st Marine battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Nguyen Van Dang.

On the same day, in the morning, Lieutenant Dang while leading his unit from Hung Vuong Housing Quarter discoved the enemy advance position behind Le Van Duyet Football Field, Ngo Tung Chau street. A violent firefight began.3 Marines moving forward along the walls were wounded by bursts of AK fire. The enemy strength in contact was about one platoon positioned on the outer perimeter.

Some fires were touched off at 10 o'clock by crisscrossing bullets.



On evening June 16th Airborne Rangers wearing masks moved into Cay Thi battle area where tear gas canisters had been dropped.



The 1st Marine Company continued their probing attack. The enemy opened up with all kinds of weapons fire such as heavy machine gun, B.40, 57mm recoilless rifle etc... The military assumed that at least 200 troops must have held this area. This force was of the Quyet Thang Regiment.

During an operation conducted by the 2nd Marine Battalion. A group of VC of the Dong Nai Regiment came out to surrender at Hang Xanh, Cau Son. As a result, this battle area became calm.

On June 13th the battle at Cay Thi was in full swing. Enemy troops overran Phan Van Tri street and the far end of Ngo-Tung Chau street. They massed the most troops in Hien Vuong Housing Quarter, Le Van Duyet Athletic Field and the area behind Lien Ung Pagoda.

Since the afternoon the Airborne force consisting of the 5th and the 9th Battalions had been taking up blocking positions while the Marines launched a deep thrust into the objective. The VC dugin behind Lien Ung Pagoda to prepare for a tenacious defense.

On the morning of June 14th the Marines pulled out far enough for the artillery to bombard the objective. The shelling continued for 10 hours. As the artillery fire lifted the Marines resumed the attack. The enemy in fortified positions set up in houses and gardens returned fire violently. By nightfall the battle remained indecisive on a front extended from Xom Ga Hamlet as far as Cay-Thi Road Junction.

At night the Marines withdrew to hold blocking positions to the South and to the east of the battle area.

On the following morning of June 15th at 0630 hours 3 Airborne Ranger Companies moved in from southwest of Ngo Tung Chau street to replace the Marines who pulled out to take up blocking positions. The Airborne Rangers prepared to launch a thrust to the northeast aiming at destroying the enemy force positioned in the area.

The clashes were atrocious during the day. To avoid causing heavy casualties and damages to the people Prime Minister Tran Van Huong had forbidden the use of air and artillery in built up areas where refugees were hudlled. Therefore, friendly troops found it difficult to destroy the enemy forces, since they had positioned themselves in these built up areas for 4 to 5 days and had taken advantage of this time to dig strong emplacements and trench slits.

The Airborne rangers had violent contact 100m from the line of departure in the vicinity of the textile factory at Xom Ga cross-roads. The four VC manning this advance position were killed.

At 8 o'clock 106mm recoilless rifles had to be used. As the fire lifted the airborne rangers moved into the attack but met only weak resistance. At 0810 hours all the Delta teams under the command of Major Phan Van Huan advanced to seize the high buildings in the zone of action. At 0825 hours another Airborne Ranger unit had violent contact on the grounds of Buu Lang Pagoda. At the same time the first column reported that they also were having contact with some resistance nests. Later on the third column was also engaged in a fight inside a building.They later reported that a wounded VC was captured prisoner. At 1050 hours the enemy from a position 50m from the Airborne Ranger Command Post launched a B.40 rocket wounding a US Major advisor to the airborne rangers and a UPI reporter. At 1045 hours a machine gun manned by the airborne rangers and positioned 50m from the VC defensive line destroyed a hostile B.40 in a building. The VC gunner was killed on the spot. The remaining VC returned fire with a B.40 wounding 3 more airborne rangers severely. Then they set fire to a house next to the building assault by our troops. Before withdrawing, the VC from a nearby garden launched four consecutive B.40 rockets wounding 5 more among which was an Armed Forces photographer whose name was Nguyen Van Cau.

The battle at Cay Thi was on the 4th day although after 3 days of hard fighting the enemy had lost 23 dead by body count and a number of others buried in caved-in dugouts.

On the afternoon of June 15th the battle tapered off. The airborne rangers conducted another night raid. As it became dark 6 Delta Teams commanded by Lieutenant Tu Ba Tho and supported by the 2nd and the 3rd Airborne Ranger Companies split into 2 columns to penetrate into the battle area.

But when the above columns had crept into the enemy line for about 30m a flare fired from Bang Ky Bridge revealed their position. Then the clash erupted. Also, thanks to the flare the Delta Teams were able to discover in time the VC positioned in a house. They quickly launched a 3.5 rocket which blew in the house killing all its occupants.

Some time later the Delta Teams and the Airborne Rangers pulled out. During the raid friendly and enemy troops were so close together that grenades frequently had to be used.

Also in the previous night the enemy had made probing attacks for routes of withdrawal through Phan Van Tri street and in the direction of the railroad but these attacks were turned back by the Marines.

On the morning of June 16th a VC came out to surrender. He said that he was from the K. 2 Quyet Tien Battalion. His unit had moved from Bung Long to Gia Dinh with an estimated strength of 300 men. He also disclosed that the K. 2 Battalion consisted of 5 companies. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd rifle companies, the reconnaissance company and the communications company. He was from the signal company composed of 24 personnel but at this time only 14 were available. Also according to him an estimated 150 VC in civilian clothes armed with powerful weapons had been instructed to hold fast in this area and withdraw only under favorable conditions. His company commander had been wounded the day before and Bang Tai the battalion commander whose finger had been cut off by a bullet was still in command and had ordered the unit to fight to the death.

On the same morning Major Que the 81st Airborne Ranger battalion commander sent the 3rd Airborne Ranger Company to replace the Delta Teams which were assigned to reinforce the 1st and the 2nd companies preparing for another battle.

All morning long bursts of fire were heard but these came from probing clashes. At noon 2 tanks were directed to take positions at Lane 143, Ngo Tung Chau street and on the flank of Phuoc Hoa Am Pagoda to fire on enemy positions. The VC returned fire disabling one and forced them to pull out. Some time later 3 US tanks with bulldozer blades took up positions by the side of the 2 RVNAF tanks and awaited orders.

At 1600 hours tear gas canisters were dropped on the enemy positions but while the gas was being dropped from the aircraft a sudden strong wind blew the gas towards Go Vap. The enemy was slightly affected but the population around the battle area suffered the most.

Tanks and tear gas were all ineffective so the airborne rangers had to revert to night attack tactics once again to deal with the situation.

The 2nd and the 3rd Airborne Ranger Companies silently crept into the battle area. They made contact with the enemy at 0325 hours but only met with light resistance.

At 0400 hours these units seized the entire objective and even reached Ngu Hanh Temple and got close to the gate of Hien Vuong Housing Quarter I. 17 VC were killed during the attack, 3 B.40s 5 AKs and 1 pistol were captured. These weapons were either burned or bullet riddled.

On the morning of June 17th a captain, the assistant-commander of the Quyet Thang Regiment,whose name was Phan Van Xung surrendered and revealed that the enemy had withdrawn to the Nam A textile plant leaving behind but one small unit to fight in a delaying and diversion action. This surrendered high ranking officer also disclosed that the enemy probably still had an estimated 230 men on hand but only 120 were fit for combat while the remainder were all wounded.

So this mauled unit about 200 strong had attempted to escape through the encirclement under the cover of darkness. At about 0100 hours they moved to the steel railway bridge to withdraw in the direction of Hiep Binh Hamlet. One should remember that on the day before an element of the Dong Nai Regiment had intended to reinforce the encircled Quyet Thang Regiment but when it reached An Phu Dong it had been smashed by the 3rd Airborne Battalion leaving behind 100 dead.

While the enemy unit got close to the steel bridge it was fired upon by the 6th Marine Battalion positioned there and was forced to pull back to Bang Ky Bridge where it was met by the 1st Marine Battalion which pushed it back to the cemetery around Giac Quang Pagoda.

At 6 o'clock, Major Phan Van Thang, 1st Marine Battalion commander was personnally in command of the 2nd and the 4th Marine companies to conduct a cordon and search operation in this area.

Many clashes were reported. The Marines killed 5 VC, captured 2 and received one surrendered VC.

The surrendered VC whose name was Ho Van E and who was a native of Binh Duong Province, disclosed that while withdrawing from Cay Thi, the Quyet Thang 1st and 2nd Battalions had joined together to move through the burned area behind Cay Thi Market. They had crossed the road junction, taken over in the surrounding houses where they awaited darkness. After which they were to attempt to follow the previously attempted route of withdrawal in the direction



Area in vicinity of Giac Quang Pagoda cemetery where survivors of VC Quyet Thang Regiment had surrendered in mass.



A Marine searching one of the dug-outs around Giac Quang Pagoda.



152 VC surrendered in Gia Dinh on June 17th, 1968.



Surrendered VC troops and cadres embarking on trucks

of the steel bridge. In this escape attempt they were halted by the Marines.

He also declared that these defeated units were approximately 200 strong. All were exhausted and had been short of food for 2 days. Some days before, they had still been able to get food from the people's houses but since 2 days ago they had found nothing to eat. They all wanted to rally but were afraid that our troops might fire on them by mistake.

At 0930 hours Major Thang ordered all operational forces to cease fire and to shoot only when necessary to let the Polwar team of the 502/50 Company call the enemy out to rally.

On June 17th in the afternoon the rallied officer, former VC Captain Phan Van Xuong called to his comrades in arms to come out and rally. They still stayed behind in the Cay Thi battle area.

Later in the evening while the recorded voice of Captain Phan Van Xuong was being transmitted from the air, VC troops began to rally by groups of 5, 7 or more than 10.

By the end of June 18th 152 VC of the Quyet Thang Regiment committed in Gia Dinh battle area had rallied to the Marines of the 1st Battalion and had delivered many AKs, one 60mm mortar, ten B40s, ten B 41s, documents, and a large quantity of ammunition.

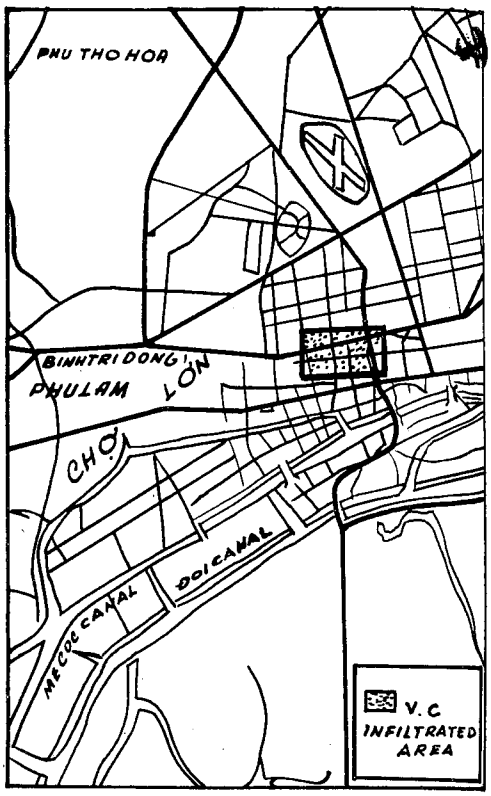
During the clash on June 17th in the afternoon, 1 km to the east of Gia Dinh, 30 VC were killed. The Marines also captured 17 individual and 3 crew served weapons. Also during the same period of time in an area near Cay Thi road Junction the Marines killed 31 VC, captured 29 individual and 16 crew served weapons.

By then the operations to the north of the Capital ended, crowned with a mass surrender of 152 VC troops and cadre. This was the highest number of troop to surrender in the history of the conflict in Viet Nam. This event caused agitation in the opinions of the people in North Vietnam. The North Vietnam Government refused to admit this failure but ascribed it to a fake event invented by the government of the Republic of Vietnam. This denial was merely a measure to soothe the North Vietnamese anxiety and the decaying morale of the VC troops.

The battle of Cholon

(From May 27th to June 7th, 1968)

Two days following the attack on Gia Dinh on May 27th, 1968 another battle erupted in Cholon.



Tactical situation on June 5th 68 in Cho-Lon

Initially, the enemy harassed Cau Tre area Rural Road 14. At night, they penetrated into Phu Lam A housing Quarter where all lines of communication from the Delta provinces meet. The occupation of this point suspended all traffic along the portion of the highway from Phu Lam Quay to Hau Giang - Phu Dinh Crossroads during May 27th. The 38th Ranger Battalion and 2 companies of the 2nd Marine Battalion were sent to the battle area. Supported by gunships and armored personnel carriers, they reoccupied the above Housing Quarter at 8 o'clock on May 27th. In the afternoon traffic was moving again. However, cargo trucks were escorted by police forces into the city. On hearing the firing of weapons the people in Cholon suburbs still haunted by the last event huddled together to take refuge. However, many still stayed in their houses to protect their property against possible looting. In the afternoon many fires were seen with clouds of smoke rising from Phu Lam A Housing Quarter. Many fire engines had come since the morning but could not get close to put out the fires.

The Marines of the 2nd battalion withdrew again from Phu Lam A at nightfall to take positions in Hau Giang street. Two of the battalion's companies were still retained for operations around Go Vap.

Therefore, during the night, the enemy took advantage of the undefended area by penetrating and reoccupying the Phu Lam A Housing Quarter. They used it as a base from which to launch attacks on the two companies of the 2nd Marine Battalion positioned in Hau Giang street.

Due to insufficient strenght these companies had to split

into small groups setting up holding positions in high building and spreading along a 3 km long front. A company of the 38th Ranger Battalion came to reinforce at 5 o'clock in the morning. The Rangers and the Marines then conducted a combined mop-up operation but they were delayed in their advance by violent enemy fire directed from built-up areas. In the afternoon, they reached the above Housing Quarter but pulled back once again at nightfall. So the battle front remained unchanged. This was the third time that fighting had occurred in this small corner.

On the fourth day of the battle i.e. on May 30th, the 38th Ranger Battalion launched a flank attack on the objective which was still the Phu Lam A Housing Quarter. Their line of departure was from a creek at Phu Lam Bridge while the 2nd Marine Battalion now in full strength led the frontal attack from the city. The Marine Command Post was stationed in a multistoried house 150m from Phu Dinh - Hau Giang Crossroads.

During the night, the enemy not only remained in Phu Lam A but also occupied the Cong Thanh Garage at No 704, Hau Giang street. After a firefight for more than 2 hours, this garage suffered rather heavy damages. Inside, large stains of blood were seen but the enemy had departed.

The Eagle Dry Battery Factory near the Cong Thanh Garage was hit with all kinds of explosives and was heavily damaged. The attack to seize this objective claimed 3 Marines killed and one wounded by the first enemy burst of fire. Only in the afternoon were tanks able to maneuver and fire on the factory. The enemy still resisted stubbornly so air strikes were later directed to eliminate the defenders. A big fire was touched off.

Phu Lam A Housing Quarter was also seized during the day by strenuous efforts because the enemy had delayed the advance of our troops by fighting from dominating buildings along Hau Giang street. 10 VC of the 6th Binh Tay Battalion and the 308th Battalion were captured. They disclosed that in execution of the plan of attack their units were dispersed in teams of four to man positions in dominating buildings and were ordered to fight to the last man.

On every killed VC body was found a 3 point order to implement the plan of attack. These points were as follows :

1. Only 1 squad is to be used to attack a police station.



Clouds of smoke from devastating fires in Phu Dinh area on the afternoon May 30th, 1968



Around the clock curfews were applied only for definite areas. Curfew limits from Dong Khanh Street into Cholon were indicated as two signs shown above.

B. 40s should be used as much as possible.

2. Do not move alcng lanes to avoid getting lost. Cling to people's houses. Use force, as required, to secure the secrecy of troop movements.

3. Apply the motto : when wounded, prompt evacuation, if killed, prompt inhumation.

On the afternoon May 30th Major Bang, the 38th Ranger battalion commander, discovered that many enemy groups were infiltrating into the city from the direction of the Coconut palm garden in Phu Dinh. In spite of interdiction fires the enemy kept on sneaking in. The Rangers counterattacked. At 4 o'clock in the morning, the battalion commander personnaly led 2 companies creeping silently towards the enemy and ordered Captain Nghenh, the battalion assistant commander to maneuver the remaining companies into Phu Dinh Street to block the enemy route of withdrawal. All at once the enemy appeared. A violent clash ensued. The Rangers totally won this battle causing the enemy about 100 dead. One 82mm mortar, four 60mm mortars, three heavy machineguns, two AKs, one B40, one B41,and two M16s were captured.But the enemy succeeded in infiltrating into the city though. A rather large number of them had sneaked into Cholon during the night. The quadrangle limited by Truong Tan Buu, Pham Dinh Ho, Thap Muoi, Phu Dinh Streets in Binh Tay area was completely in their hands. They had penetrated late at night. The policemen on guard made no reaction at all when the VC appeared in the streets, occupied many dominating buildings and isolated the Marines positioned at Renault bridge. Scattered VC groups also appeared at the Post Office and Cholon railroad station on Tong Doc Phuong Street.

The 30th Ranger Battalion ,one Marine company, and two Police Field Force companies were sent to hold the advance of the enemy. Colonel Tran Van Hai, the Ranger commander went right to the front to direct the operations.

All traffic to the Delta provinces was delayed.

One company of the 38th Ranger Battalion adjacent to the unit moving on an envelopment attack on the rear of VC elements appeared in Truong Tan Buu Street (Cholon) had immediate contact with the enemy as they crossed the line of departure. In Hau Giang Street, enemy fire were heard here and there. The 2nd Marine Battalion positioned in this area was considered isolated from the rear when Binh Tay fell into enemy hands.



On the afternoon of May 30th, 68, supported by armed helicopters and tanks, the Marines were attacking enemy troops positioned in the Eagle Battery Plant.



A Marine in firing position during a sweep in Hau Giang street. Photo recorded on May 30th 1968.

Our relief forces then moved into the battle area while a blocking force consisting of policemen and personnel from Cay Mai Intelligence School were positioned all along Mai Xuan Thuong Street from the intelligence School as far as Nhi Thien Duong Bridge. To the left was Dong Khanh Street, to the right Hong Bang Street and farther outside Tong Doc Phuong Street, everything was guarded by the Rangers and the policemen.

The civilian residents in the battle area had been warned to leave their homes prior to H. hour by Colonel Tran Van Hai through a loudspeaker. He also at the same time transmitted the order of the General, Chief of the Joint General Staff urging all troops to respect the people's property. Some prisoners of war were also allowed to call out to their comrades to lay down their arms. At 1030 hours the operational forces started their advance. A column departing from Tong Doc Phuong - Nguyen Trai Crossroads moved down the road. The enemy returned fire promptly in Tong Doc Phuong Street but our troops gradually drove them to Phung Hung Street where the enemy had opened case - like holes through the walls of the buildings. Such tactics proved to be effective. We had to use M. 79 grenade launchers and 57mm recoilless rifles to reduce hostile positions one by one. Phung Hung Street suffered rather heavy damages particularly at the textile market and the area lying between Nguyen Trai and Dong Khanh Streets.

Early in the afternoon the enemy pushed close to Ly Thanh Nguyen Street. Many violent engagements broke out. Ten VC lay dead on the battle area.

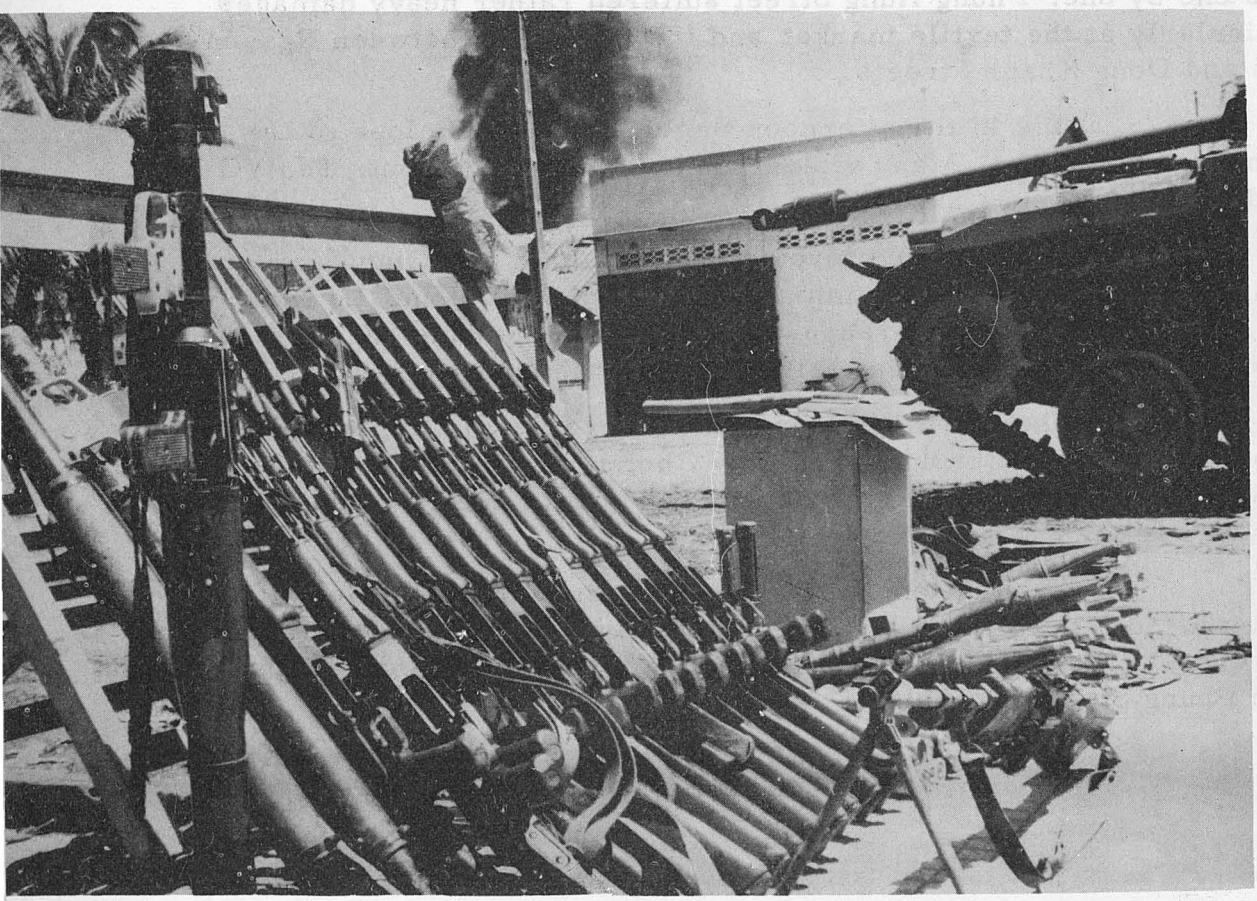
Another police force advanced along Hau Giang and Phan Dinh Ho Streets under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Le Ngoc Tru and within supporting range of heavy machine guns cal. 50 mounted on tanks. Some policemen fell dead under intense enemy fire.

In the morning, many Skyraiders flew in to provide air support. Many fires broke out in New Cholon at noon. The firemen came and extinguished the flames, saving in time the rice depots while the fighting was still raging.

The situation at Phu Lam A calmed down as the battle front shifted into Cholon. We had completely gained control of the Phu Lam A Housing Quarters, Rural Roads 14 and 15, Road 46 and Minh Phung Street in Cholon.



A wounded VC being evacuated out of Phu Lam A area of operations by the Rangers



The 2nd Marine Battalion war trophy collected during the operations at Phu Lam A

Houses in this area were devastated by the fire. Black decomposing charred bodies emitted stinky odors. The firemen had to wear masks and rubber gloves to pick up corpses and load them on trucks for burial elsewhere. Added to the ruins were scattered burned civilian and military vehicles.

On June 1st, hearing that the situation was improving, the refugees began to return secretly to see if their homes had been damaged. In total, 283 were killed by body count in this area. The Marines captured 7 crew-served and 40 individual weapons. On the friendly side, 13 were killed and 63 wounded.

One of the Marine heroes was Corporal Le Thanh, 27. While Thanh and three other Marines were left on the roof of a building on Hau Giang Street without contact with their unit for 40 hours, Thanh himself achieved a record, killed 20 VC although he had been wounded in the chest.

Also on June 1st the rangers and policemen repelled the enemy as far as Ly Thanh Nguyen Street. But as darkness came the rangers and police had to pull back. The VC once again took advantage of darkness and the undefended area to return to hold positions in the buildings. They pushed vehicles in the streets to set up barricades.

On Sunday morning at 7 o'clock the operational forces penetrated again into the battle area. Clashes followed. In Khong Tu Street the enemy pressure was the heaviest then around Ly Thanh Nguyen and Manh Tu Streets. The Communists organized defensive positions in the buildings from the Nghia Xanh Motorbike Import Agency to the old Delta bound bus station.

Their fire was so violent that heavy tanks had to be called in. A fire was touched off. Many wounded VC were burned alive in the roaring flames.

In the afternoon the enemy pressure was still heavy in Khong Tu Street. Gunships came to strike at assigned targets. At 1800 hours the sky clouded over with scattered drops of rain. A US gunships flew in from the left of Khong Tu Street and launched a rocket which pierced the wall on the second floor of Phuoc Duc High School at No 226 Khong Tu Street and exploded on the entrance steps of the ground floor. Immediately following the explosion of the rocket the helicopter hovered around to strafe with machineguns. Color smoke grenades were set off to signal friendly positions. The helicopter then flew away.



Rangers of the 38th Ranger Battalion moving into devastated Phu Lam A Housing Quarter. Photo recorded on May 29th 1968.



An enemy combat position in Phu Lam A Housing Quarter

The rocket and the machinegun bullets had hit the Operational Command Post and killed many high ranking officers. These were :

Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Van Luan, Director, City National Police.
Lieutenant Colonel Le Ngoc Tru, Chief, Saigon 5th Police Precinct
Lieutenant Colonel Dao Ba Phuoc, 5th Ranger Group Commander
Lieutenant Colonel Pho Quoc Chu, Director, Saigon Port Directorate
Major Nguyen Ngoc Sinh, Assistant Director, City National Police
Major Nguyen Bao Thuy, Chief, City Security Service and brother of Lieutenant General Nguyen Bao Tri.

Other high ranking officer more or less severely wounded were :

Colonel Van Van Cua, Mayor of Saigon, with fairly serious wounds.
Colonel Nguyen Van Giam, Capital Military District Commander with light wounds.
Lieutenant Colonel Tran Van Phan, Assistant Director General, General National Police with an amputed leg.

The location of the incident was only 150 meters from the line of contact. This disastrous and important event had stirred a strong emotion among the political circle. Although it was an accident, doubtful rumors still ascribed it to a liquidation.

The battle of Cholon was in the fourth day. The situation appeared to be more critical. The enemy had opened cave - like holes through the walls to spread their forces throughout the area. Therefore, the battle was no longer limited to any distinct quarter but on the contrary isolated gunfights were heard everywhere.

On June 4th, in the afternoon, tear gas canisters were dropped from the air. Immediately following the expansion of the gas, the 30th Ranger Battalion in coordination with the policemen all wearing masks moved in but were able to gain control of only a few places.

Tear gas was of little effect because when our troops appeared the enemy could still fire on them as effectively as ever. It is said that they were also wearing masks. But in reality they covered their mouth and noses with water soaked rags or cloth to breathe through as the gas spread to them.

Just at nightfall our troops withdrew to their initial locations. After which the enemy moved up to reoccupy their previous positions. The battle area remained unchanged after the night.



Hole opened in a wall of Phuoc Duc Private High School by a rocket launched by mistake from an armed helicopter.



Photo recorded on June 2nd the preceding day of the firing incident, showing Operational Command Post Key members accompanying Lieutenant General Le Nguyen Khang, Commander of operational forces on an observation tour at battle fronts. Fronts row from left to right : a Ranger Captain, LTG Le Nguyen Khang, LTC Van Luan, Colonel Nguyen Van Giam. Next row right behind the General were LTC Dao Ba Phuoc, LTC Le Ngoc Tru.



The 30th Ranger Battalion moving in Pham Dinh Ho Street (New Cholon) on afternoon May 30th, 1968



Captured VC in Cholon

Also on June 4th the 35th Ranger Battalion commanded by Major Hoa was ordered to replace the 30th Ranger Battalion that had been fighting for 6 consecutive days. After just arriving on the battle front one company of this battalion was immediately assigned the task to hold blocking positions in Hong Bang Street because the enemy was reported to have extended their defense in that area. Many buildings were in enemy hands to include the one where the Chinese Chamber of Commerce at Phung Hung - Hong Bang Crossroads was located.

On the morning of June 5th the 35th Ranger Battalion supported by M.41 tanks was split into 2 columns. The force was to depart from Khong Tu Street and advance into the zone of action which was then divided into 2 objectives.

The 1st objective included Khong Tu, Ly Thanh Nguyen, Manh Tu and Hoc Lac Streets.

The 2nd objective included Nguyen Trai, Phung Hung, Hong Bang and Ly Thanh Nguyen Streets.

The 1st objective was considered captured at 1135 hours. The Soai Kinh Lam Restaurant which had been in the hands of the enemy for many days was reoccupied. The tanks were reassigned to support the attack on the 2nd objective which was seized at 1300 hours. The rangers continued to search the area. A new order was given on this day. The employment of air and artillery support would be limited to avoid causing injury to the people. This new order came from Major General Nguyen Van Minh the newly assigned commander of the Capital Military District who replaced Colonel Nguyen Van Giam. The order was effective as of 1000 hours June 4th 1968. But actually, the enemy force was no longer a significant threat and consisted only of isolated nests of resistance. Tank gunfire and recoilless rifle fire were used to destroy the remaining VC some of which were still fighting desperately from scattered positions.

On the morning of June 6th one company of the 38th Ranger Battalion was assigned as reinforcements with the mission to deny all other enemy infiltration into the city while the 35th Ranger Battalion continued to conduct search operations. The VC were only able to pursue the resistance in some buildings on the left of Dong Khanh and Hoc Lac Streets in front of Father Tam's Church. By 1300 hours this enemy 10 man-group was eliminated. All were killed. In other areas 30 VC bodies lay scattered here and there.

A few isolated elements were still firing because they



Soai Kinh Lam Restaurant on fire



. . . and after the event

were forced to fight to the death within our tightening encirclement. Many others from disorganized units fled for hideouts located within this area. At 1000 hours 10 VC came out to surrender. Among them were one woman and two men all of which were Chinese born cadre. They declared they were of the 6th Battalion infiltrated from Phu Lam.

In total on the morning of June 6th in particular we captured ten B.40s and B.41s, one M.79, 2 carbines, 38 AKs, and 6 automatic rifles.

At night the enemy made an attempt to escape. From the direction of Father Tam's Church 8 VC were killed by the 6th Precinct Policemen in front of the Asia Restaurant. Also during the night the Rangers killed 10 other VC in an ambush while they were running from Tong Doc Phuong Street to the 8th Precinct.

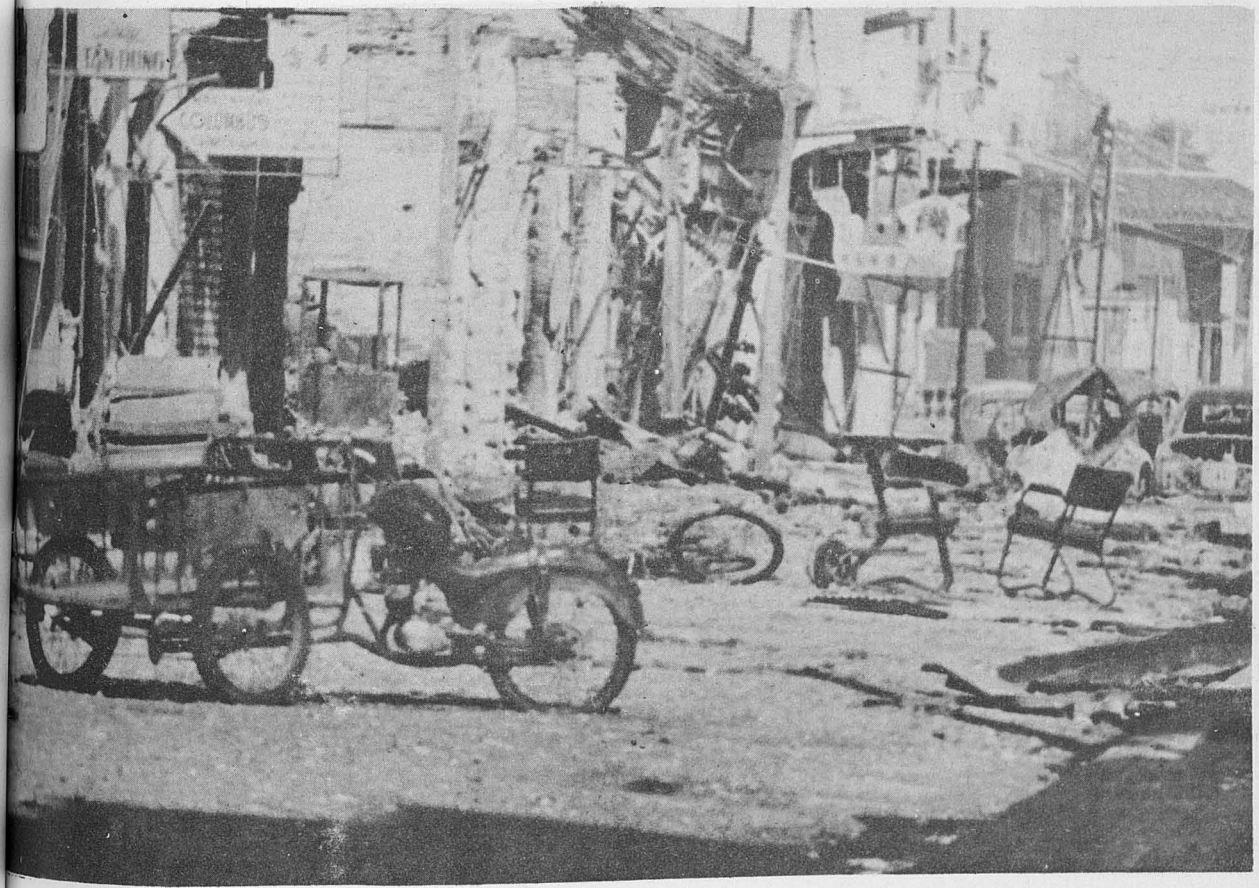
But on the night of June 6th and early morning of June 7th, a large group of VC disguised as Marines and Field Force Policemen infiltrated into the area at the end of Bang Ky Bridge and the Truong Van Ben Soap Company on Kim Bien Street. In the morning our troops returned to search Father Tam's Church area. Also on this day the Ranger Command transferred the entire 38th Ranger Battalion from Phu Lam to replace the 35th Ranger Battalion leaving the zone of operations for rehabilitation. The newly arrived battalion was commanded by Captain Nghenh acting Battalion Commander and was split into 2 columns; one composed of the 1st and the 2nd Companies came to relieve the 35th Ranger Battalion for further operations in the quadrangle Tong Doc Phuong - Hoc Lac. The 3rd and the 4th Companies were sent to restore security at Ba Cang area. It accomplished its mission by destroying an estimated VC platoon still straggling on Van Tuong, Go Cong, Ngo Thanh Tinh Streets.

In the morning the National Police Field Force repelled the enemy from their defensive positions in the Truong Van Ben Soap Factory and killed about 30 VC. The factory was severely damaged. 4 VC rallied and 2 were captured on Go Cong Street.

The Ranger column departed from Khong Tu Street via the Soap Factory to the corner of Van Tuong Street. Many isolated clashes broke out on their arrival. Immediately the Rangers captured the buildings and Palikao Bridge (Ba Cang) situated on the corner of Go Cong, Ngo Nhan Tinh Streets. From the corner of Van Tuong and Trinh Hoai Duc Streets to the bank of the creek on the other side of the swampy area the VC were firmly entrenched in their positions by



On June 3rd, tanks were maneuvering on the streets to support infantrymen in their advance into the objective.



A barricade erected with furniture and vehicles on Nguyen Trai - Phung Hung streets.



Devastated quarter in Tran Thanh Can street.
Photo recorded on June 3rd, 1968



Clouds of smoke and flames from a blaze at the end of Dong Khanh street on June 3rd 1968



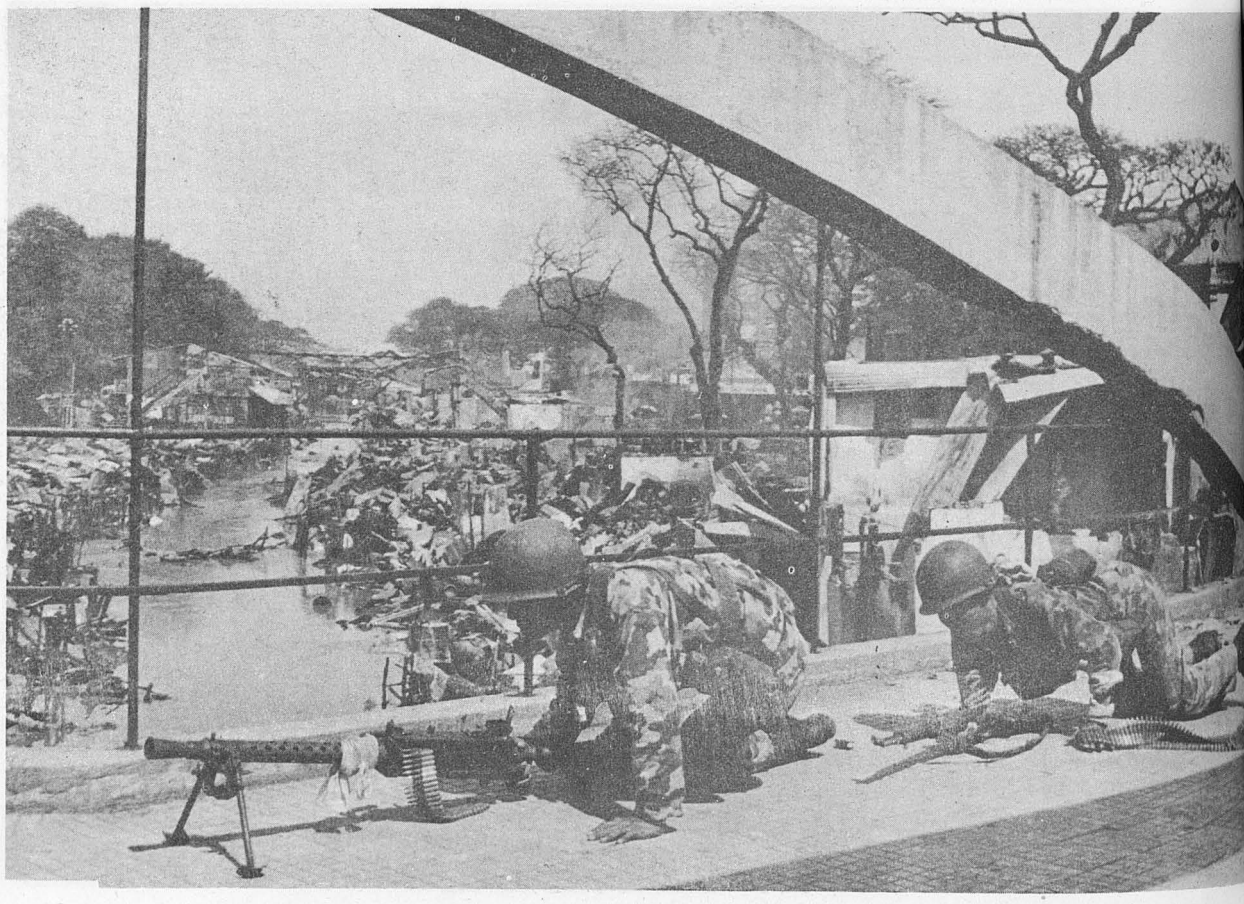
War destruction scene in Khong Tu area.



The 35th Ranger Battalion supported by tanks in an attack on buildings on Nguyen Trai - Phung Hung streets.



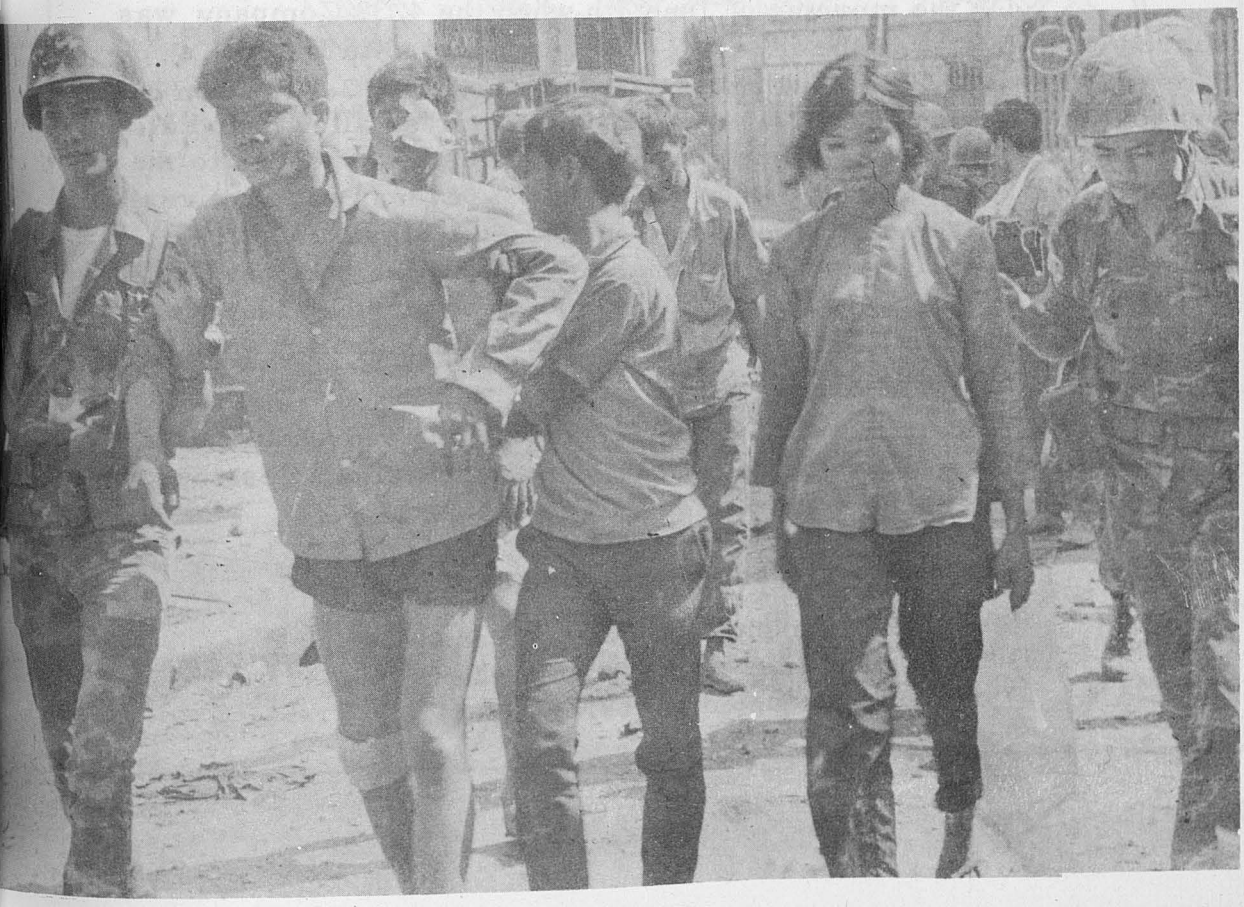
The Rangers in an attack to seize Ba Cang bridge.
Photo recorded on June 7th, 1968



A firefight at this bridge had burned down all slums along the creek.



Last cordon and search operation in a devastated street.



Desperate enemy troops and cadres leaving the battle area to surrender. Photo recorded in Cholon on June 7th, 1968.

the Rangers. The policemen of the 5th, 6th and 8th Precincts pressed the enemy into a quarter of Nguyen Van Thanh Street. The firefight lasted from noon till dark and burned down all the huts along the sides of the creek.

Also on this day the column of the 38th Ranger Battalion operating on Tong Doc Phuong and Hoc Lac Streets added 4 more VC killed and 3 AKs, one B.40 captured.

The VC troops and cadre who rallied or were captured in Go Cong Street declared that they belonged to the 308th VC Battalion except 2 who were from North Vietnam. They had infiltrated from Long An into Cholon since May 28th. One of them revealed that they had infiltrated from Long An into Cholon since June 7th. This indicated that these VC fighting in the Truong Van Ben Soap Factory were from a recently committed unit.

During the night the Rangers continued to surround the areas in Khong Tu, Go Cong, Ngo Nhan Tinh, Van Tuong Streets. The VC were "cut up" into small groups and isolated from one another. Their fighting became disorganized and desperate since they knew they had no hope of finding a way out.

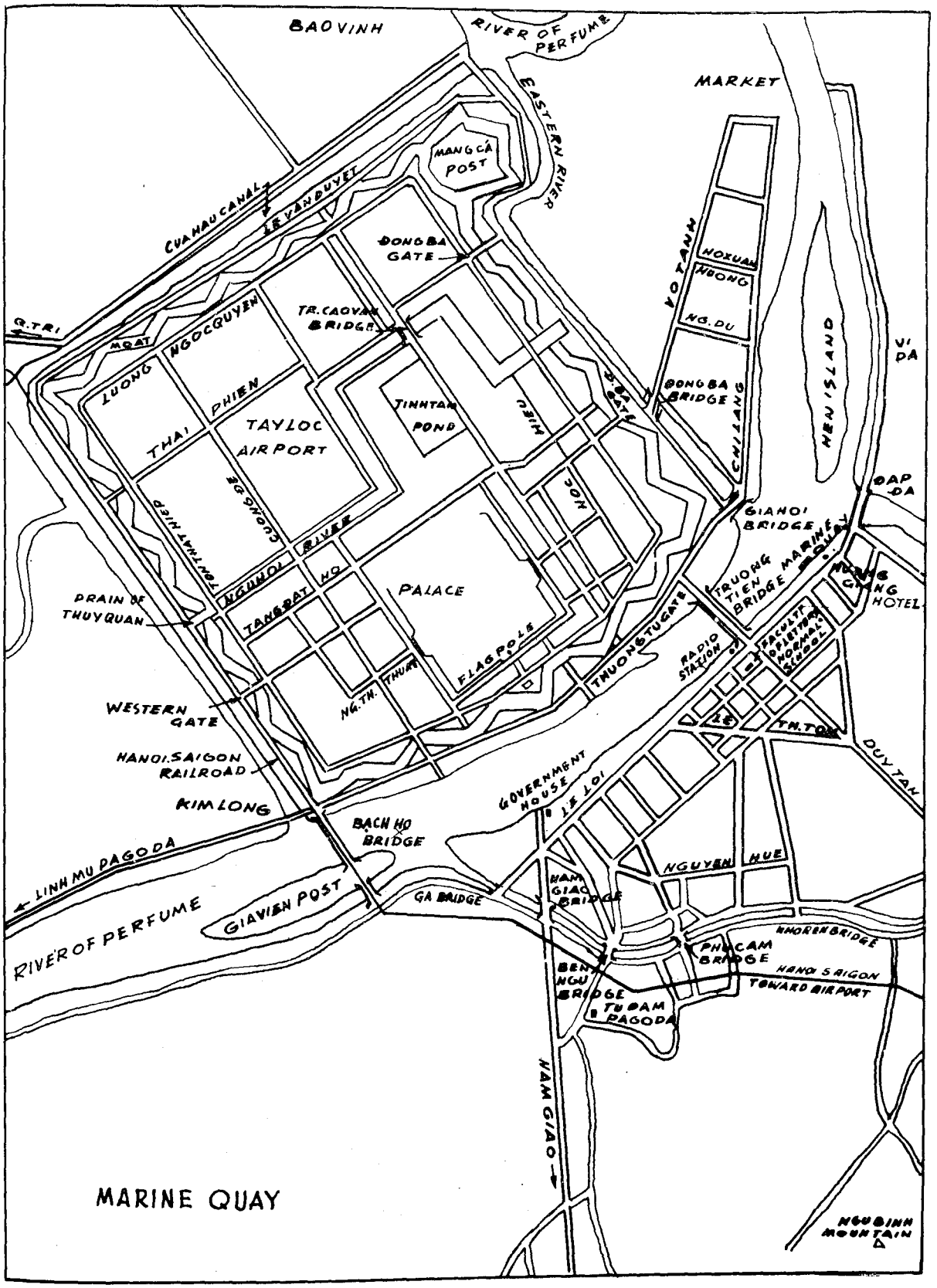
On the morning of June 7th when the 4/38 Company was searching in this area the first of 17 VC surrendered in Khong Tu Street with two B.40s. 20 minutes later another 13 VC laid down their weapons in Go Cong Street. The prisoners were then allowed to call out to their comrades to surrender. 33 isolated VC responded to the call among whom was one woman cadre. Most of them were natives from Vinh Long and Tra Vinh and belonged to the 6th and 308th VC Battalions. They also disclosed that their commander had lost contact of them 2 days ago. The commander did not know whether they were still alive or not. The 308th Battalion Commander had been wounded in the head some days earlier.

After this surrender of VC troops and cadre the battle of Cholon ended on June 7th, 1968 with 2 enemy battalions destroyed and numerous weapons captured.

The heavy weapons used in this battle were :

90mm guns mounted on US M.113 and M.48.
106mm recoilless rifles mounted on US jeeps.
76mm guns mounted on RVNAF M.41.

MAP OF HUE CITY



Hue

The battle of Hue lasted 26 days. It was the bloodiest and most destructive battle in the offensive. This was true not only because of the fighting but also because of the mass murders by the Communists. In these mass murders thousands of innocent civilians were buried alive. It was a terrible nightmare for the population of Hue. The whole city was marked by the passage of death and no house was left untouched by the war. As a matter of fact the sufferings of the residents of Thua Thien Province were indescribable and have been the subject of many moving stories in the press. This document only deals with the military aspect of the battle.

A.- GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS

Hue was very much alive on the eve of the New Year. The Dong Ba market was crowded with people. Many strangers were noticed strolling among the crowds. No one apparently paid much attention to them or thought anything unusual might happen in their peaceful city.

The same thing occured to prices in Hue as in Saigon. Two weeks before Tet goods found almost no customers even though prices were rather low. Then the sudden buying spree which marked the last days of the year caused a sharp increase in the prices of various commodities.

Throughout Tet's eve and New Year's Day firecrackers exploded almost endlessly and people went about their customary visits to relatives as if nothing were to happen.

On the morning of New Year's Day Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong, commander of the First Infantry Division, along with members of his staff were present at a flag-raising ceremony at Phu Van Lau which marked the coming of the Year of the Monkey. Shortly after the ceremony he received reports from the I Corps Headquarters that Viet Cong had attacked the towns of Nha Trang and Qui Nhon, as well as the I Corps Headquarters, the night before. The General immediately put his troops on full alert and remained at the Division Command headquarters for the night. Although complying with the order, the troops could not believe that an enemy attack

was imminent.

At 2 o'clock in the morning, as the city was in sound sleep after a day of hectic festivities, the Viet Cong simultaneously slammed hundreds of rounds of mortar and rocket into the first Division Command Headquarters, the Sector Command Headquarters, the Dong Da military training center, and positions of the 7th Armored Cavalry at An Cuu.

About one hundred 82mm mortar rounds were fired into the Greater Mang Ca area alone.

At the same time enemy forces launched a ground assault against the Mang Ca section after storming through the An Hoa gate. An enemy force approached the Tay Loc airfield and attacked the arms and ammunition depot of the 1st Ordnance Company encountering heavy resistance. Another enemy force invaded the Citadel through the west gate which they destroyed by explosive charges. A battalion-sized enemy unit attacked the north position of the An Hoa bridge and occupied it after a half-hour battle. This unit then attacked An Hoa village from which our 2nd Airborne Battalion had withdrawn the day before. Advancing further into town the enemy occupied the Bach Ho bridge and destroyed one of its spans on the left bank of the Perfume River. The Viet Cong concentrated their attack on the Mang Ca section after occupying the An Hoa gate and the west gate. They encountered fierce resistance by our defenders firing from multistoried houses.

The enemy force attacked the Tay Loc airfield but became entangled in the defensive wire and turned toward the arms and ammunition depot. At 0350 hrs. they once more concentrated their push against the airfield. They succeeded in burning the ammunition warehouse, the fuel tanks and the technicians' quarters. Throughout the following day they were unable to take the airfield. During another assault conducted at nightfall they reached the plane parking areas but were driven out the next morning.

A battle between enemy troops and the Reconnaissance Company of the First Infantry Division raged around the Imperial Palace area. This battle ended at five o'clock in the morning when the area was overrun by the enemy. A big National Liberation Front flag was hoisted atop the Citadel's main flagpole at 8 o'clock in the morning.

On the second day of Tet enemy troops invaded several populated sections of the city located on the left bank of the Perfume River. The Inner Citadel or Imperial Palace area, the Dong Ba market place, the Thuong Tu, Chanh Tay and An Hoa gates came under their control. The enemy also easily seized the southern part of the city located on the right bank of the river. Enemy elements were seen in the streets encircling friendly military positions. They had already occupied various friendly administrative buildings, including the administrative headquarters of Thua Thien province, the university compound and other buildings. The MACV square, the Thua Thien sector command headquarters, the radio station, the pilot school and the Navy dock were still untouched.

On the second morning of Tet the First Division Commander ordered the 2nd Airborne Battalion to rush to the city from their location at Tu Ha to assist in relieving enemy pressure on the city. The paratroopers could hardly move into the city in the face of the enemy's heavy fire from civilian houses. They also lacked air support which was not available due to bad weather. A counter-attack by the 3/3 Battalion from the Nam Giao market also failed to relieve enemy pressure in the area. The 7th Armored Cavalry stationed at An Cuu then ordered to move toward the Citadel.

During the morning three attempts to enter the city by the 7th Armored Cavalry commanded by Lt. Col. Phan Huu Chi, were unsuccessful. Around noon an American convoy came from Phu Bai to reinforce Col. Chi's armor column, which again tried to reach the city with three tanks leading the counter-attack. The American convoy kept firing into the sugar fields on both sides of the road and stopped at the city's outskirts. The three tanks pushed ahead and finally reached the City Police Headquarters in downtown Hue. The Headquarters was still in friendly hands. Col. Chi's tank was hit by an enemy B.40 rocket fired from a nearby house. He was killed.

The situation in Hue was very confused throughout the second day of Tet. All military installations were still in friendly hands. Only the recruiting office near the Bach Ho bridge and the field police base were occupied by the enemy after the overwhelmingly outnumbered defenders had fled. The Le Lai camp, where the 811th Ordnance Company was stationed, was also overrun after a few days' resistance. The defenders had run out of ammunition and fled.

At 8 o'clock in the morning on the third day of Tet,

the First Airborne Battle Group, which included the 2nd and 7th Battalions and the 3/7 Armor troop reached the city from An Lo and Tu Ha. The reinforcing 1st Airborne Headquarters and the 7th Battalion arrived in Hue from Saigon at noon the same day.

Heavy fighting occurred in the village of An Hoa and Doc Xo. Finally the enemy withdrew into the Citadel.

The Communists held out in the Mang Ca area, the ordnance base and the airfield. They launched an assault on the Mang Ca Camp, home of the headquarters of the First Infantry Division. A number of enemy soldiers, who penetrated the position of the Division's Medical Company, were killed. Many friendly wounded soldiers and nurses were massacred.

After several days of counter-attacks by friendly forces, using armor, artillery and air support, the enemy abandoned the An Hoa area and the technicians' quarters of the Tay Loc Airfield in order to strenghthen their position at the Chanh Tay Gate.

During the fighting, populated areas of Hue were opened to Communist political propaganda activities. The Viet Cong moved freely in the streets for three days in a row, from the second to the fourth day of Tet, without any friendly reaction.

There were no American forces in Hue when the city was attacked except for a MACV sector advisory group which was located near the Thua Thien sector command.

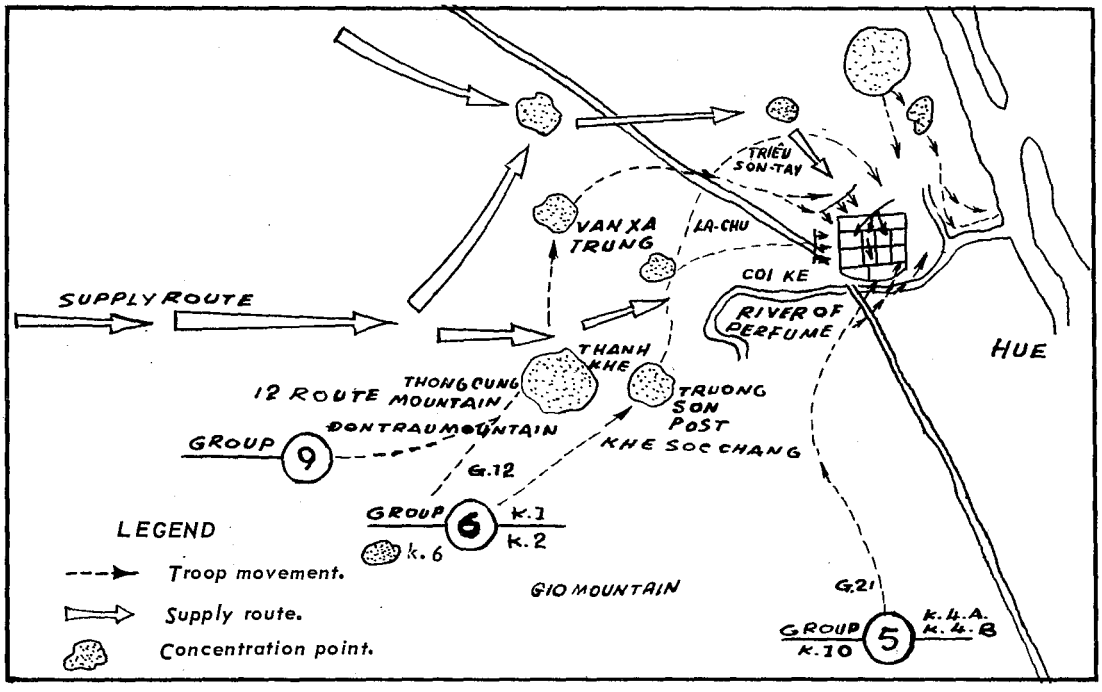
It was not until the afternoon of the third day of Tet that a company of U.S. Marines arrived as the first american unit to reinforce the MACV element.

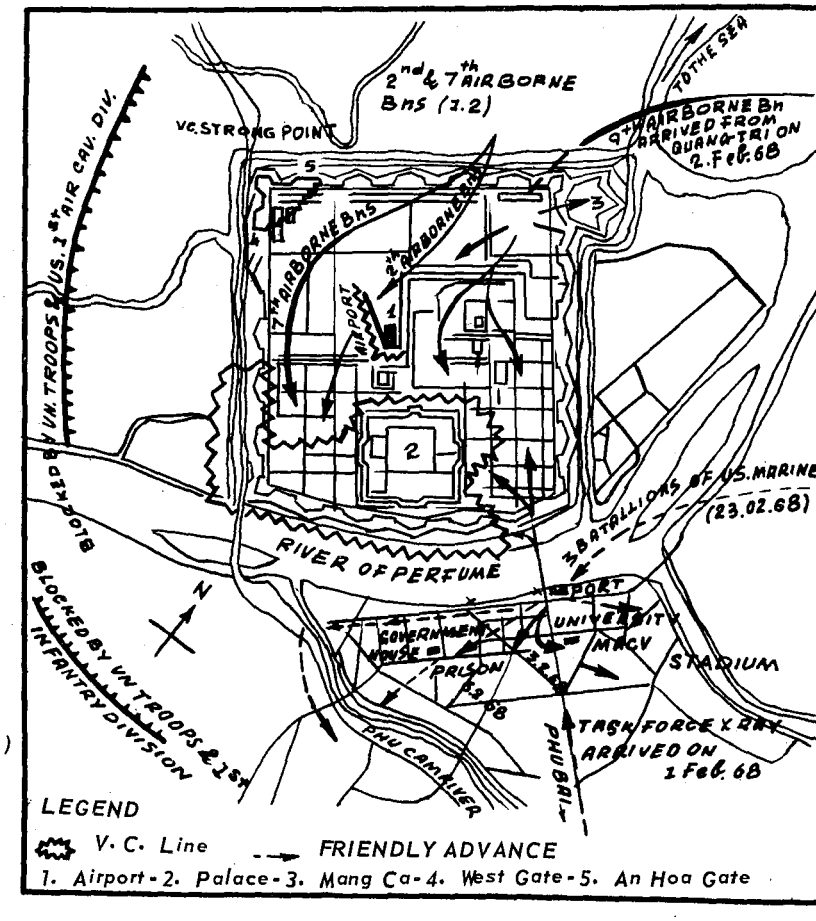
The U.S. Marine unit, moving in from the east, crossed the Perfume River by boats and landed near the Pilot School (see chart of operation, stage I). From there they moved to the MACV compound about 700 meters away.

In the third, fourth and fifth days of Tet (Feb.1, 2 and 3, 1968) American forces, including three Marine companies and one armor battalion from the First Marine Division, moved to the right bank of the Perfume River and established their base behind the MACV compound. They launched their first operations to help liberate Hue from here.

On the fourth day of Tet the Viet Cong attacked the

THE ENEMY ATTACK IN HUE





FIRST PHASE OF THE LIBERATION OF HUE

(From News Week-Magazine)

First Engineer Battalion one kilometer south of Hue. They also maintained their pressure on the Tay Loc area, the Citadel, the Flagpole area, the administrative sector and the Dong Khanh high school. That night the enemy overran the city prison and freed about 2,000 prisoners of all categories. This added more confusion to the situation in Hue. The freed prisoners, armed by the enemy, roamed the streets and committed acts of reprisal.

During the fifth night of Tet the enemy burned a military fuel depot at the Dinh market one kilometer northeast of Hue. Scattered enemy actions were reported around the base camp of the 111th Transportation Battalion at An Cuu.

You may recall that Lt. Col. Phan Van Khoa, Chief of Thua Thien province, concurrently Mayor of Hue, was reported missing during the first days of the enemy offensive. He was at first believed to have been murdered by the enemy. Actually he escaped unhurt. At times he had to disguise himself as a hospital patient.

The actual counterattack by friendly forces did not begin until the fifth day of Tet.

The combined Vietnamese - Allied operation was conducted as follows :

- The American forces, consisting of the 2/5 Marine Battalion with three companies and an armor battalion, started out from the MACV compound while the RAY Battle Group, consisting of two Marine companies, set out from the An Cuu bridge. Their mission was to clear the right bank of the Perfume River.

- The Vietnamese forces, consisting of the First Airborne Battle Group with three battalions and one armor Squadron initiated their action from north of the Citadel. The 9th Airborne Battalion, helilifted from Quang Tri to the Mang Ca camp on the afternoon of the fourth day of Tet, also maneuvered into the Citadel. The First Airborne Battle Group, reinforced by elements of the First Infantry Division, was to clear the left bank of the Perfume River.

Another friendly force took position northwest and southwest of Hue. This was the First U.S. Air Cavalry Division which had moved from An Khe in the pre-Tet days in order to assist with the military situation at Khe Sanh.

ARVN troops reoccupied half of the Citadel airfield

and the An Hoa gate during the fifth day of Tet. In this battle the enemy suffered 77 killed and 27 weapons captured. Friendly casualties were light.

On the sixth day of Tet (Feb. 4, 1968) there were no major developments. The enemy took advantage of the old French fortresses to resist allied forces in the Thuong Tu and Ky Dai areas.

The enemy pressure on the left bank at Hue University and the MACV compound, was broken by the U.S. 2/5 Marine Battalion supported by Ontos each of which was equipped with six 106mm recoilless rifles. Fighting from street to street the Americans withdrew to the MACV area for the night and resumed this seesaw pattern the following day. These tactics failed to liberate the right bank of the Perfume River. However these tactics were aimed at taking full advantage of superior fire power to destroy small and scattered enemy units. Land control was only of secondary importance. In fact elements of the 2/5 U.S. Marine Battalion were able to break enemy pressure against several military installations and populated areas. As friendly troops withdrew from these areas, after a few hours' occupation, the enemy returned and resumed their sniper fire. During the first six days of Tet the enemy virtually controlled the administrative area, including the office of the government delegate, the residence of the province chief, the city jail and the Khai Dinh high school. On the friendly side the 12th Sea Junk Force still patrolled the Perfume River. It took light casualties from enemy mortar fire. Air support was limited because of bad weather.

The following day, the seventh day of Tet, the Communists launched an attack against the 1st Engineer Battalion one kilometer south of Hue. One ARVN battalion, in the meantime, moved to reinforce the friendly force in the Citadel.

In the afternoon American troops retook a large portion of the right bank. The Viet Cong remained entrenched at the Quoc Hoc high school.

At 11:30 AM on the ninth day of Tet, reinforced by two battalions from An Hoa - Kim Long, the enemy launched an assault against 4/3 Battalion stationed at Chanh Tay. This attack caused fairly heavy casualties for the friendly side as well as losses of communication equipment and weapons. Seven enemy blew up the Trang Tien bridge destroying two of its 12 spans.

On the tenth day of Tet American troops recaptured the office of the Administrative Delegate. The enemy continued to hold out at the stadium, the railway station and the Phu Cam area. A U.S. Marine force had been positioning their forces, opposite the railway station at the end of Le Loi street, near the University compound for two days.

Friendly forces on the left bank made no progress.

American troops, on the right bank of the Perfume River, successfully drove the enemy out of the stadium, the railway station and Phu Cam on Feb. 9, 1968 - the 11th day of the first lunar month. The Communists split into smaller units and withdrew toward Nam Giao.

From Jan. 31 to Feb. 9, 1968, a ten-day period, the enemy lost 934 killed, 4 captured, and had 307 of his weapons seized. American casualties were 31 killed, 201 seriously and 80 lightly wounded.

Although a 24-hour curfew was imposed by the province administration and publicized by Hue Radio, many of the City's residents took advantage of the decreased intensity of the fighting to return to their homes to fetch whatever belongings they could. There were two refugee camps on the right bank. One was located at the Redemptorist Church and the other at the Pilot School. A third camp was established at Phu Luong.These camps were set up immediately after American troops started their counterattack . As friendly operations advanced more and more civilians were liberated from the Communists and transferred to the refugee camps. The refugees prepared their meals themselves. They even tore down windows and pieces of furniture to cook their meals since they lacked firewood.

The bodies of the dead which had been left scattered on war-torn streets and alleys of the ancient imperial capital city - Viet Cong as just plain innocent civilians - were not collected for burial until Feb. 10, 1968. The odor of decomposition filled the air. The burials were only temporary. The bodies were merely buried on the side of streets and alleys. The Thua Thien Sector Command had to call in a number of Regional Force men stationed in Huong Thuy district and cadets of the Dong Da Training Center in Phu Bai to launch a sweep operation against enemy remnants and to resume control of all the remaining populated sections of the city.

American Marines were helilifted into the city to reinforce the 2/5 U.S. Battalion on the right bank of the Perfume River at 1600 hr. on Feb. 10. This was the first such reinforcement since the Hue battle began. The helilift was finally completed satisfactorily despite very bad weather. Another Marine unit moved by truck into the city from Phu Bai at the same time. The local officials and people became optimistic as they witnessed all these reinforcing troop movements.

In the afternoon of Feb. 10, an LCU of the Vietnamese Sea Junk Force arrived by the Teachers' Training School and picked up a cargo of supplies from the first Division Command headquarters which was on the left bank of the Perfume River. These supplies were then ferried to the military installations of the Thua Thien Sector on the right bank.

In the section north of the Perfume River three Vietnamese airborne battalions and four infantry battalions were closing in on an enemy force firmly entrenched among bunkers and battle-scarred houses. The Gia Hoi section was still under enemy control as was two-thirds of Phan Boi Chau street. Friendly troops advanced cautiously within the Citadel since the enemy still held many vantage points. The search-and-destroy operation was made more difficult because the enemy chose to hide among the people and their dwellings.

The commander of the First Infantry Division faced a difficult choice on whether to execute slow, careful house-to-house fighting or to engage in a swift steamroller operation. The former would save civilian lives and property but would cost extra friendly casualties. The latter could result in a swifter liquidation of enemy pockets of resistance but would entail sizeable human and material losses for the trapped civilians.

On the morning of Feb. 12 an advance reconnaissance unit of the Marine Battle Group A was helilifted into the Citadel.

At 1800h. a US Marine unit crossed the Perfume River, landed on Bao Vinh quay and started to maneuver into the Citadel. On the morning of Feb. 13 the landing operation of US Marines on Bao Vinh continued. This was the first time in the Hue battle that American Marines engaged the enemy inside the Citadel as they were reinforcing Vietnamese troops. They were warmly welcomed by the people.

Enemy positions in Lai Chu, just outside the northwestern walls of the citadel, were pounded continuously by friendly artillery and jet fighters. This area was believed to be the enemy's central command headquarters. Fighting inside the Citadel was very sporadic.

Refugees took advantage of the improved situation and streamed from various points toward safer areas, such as Tay Loc, Tay Linh and Mang Ca. These areas became major refugee centers. Public administration on both sides of the river of the city was thoroughly disrupted. There were a severe shortage of officials. Many officials were murdered or abducted, others died accidentally in the fighting, still others simply fled.

On Feb. 13 or the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, for the first time in fifteen days, the monsoonal drizzle stopped.

The sky was still lightly clouded but there was some sunshine in the city. Wave after wave of jet bombers flew in and gave close air support to the foot soldiers fighting in the Citadel.

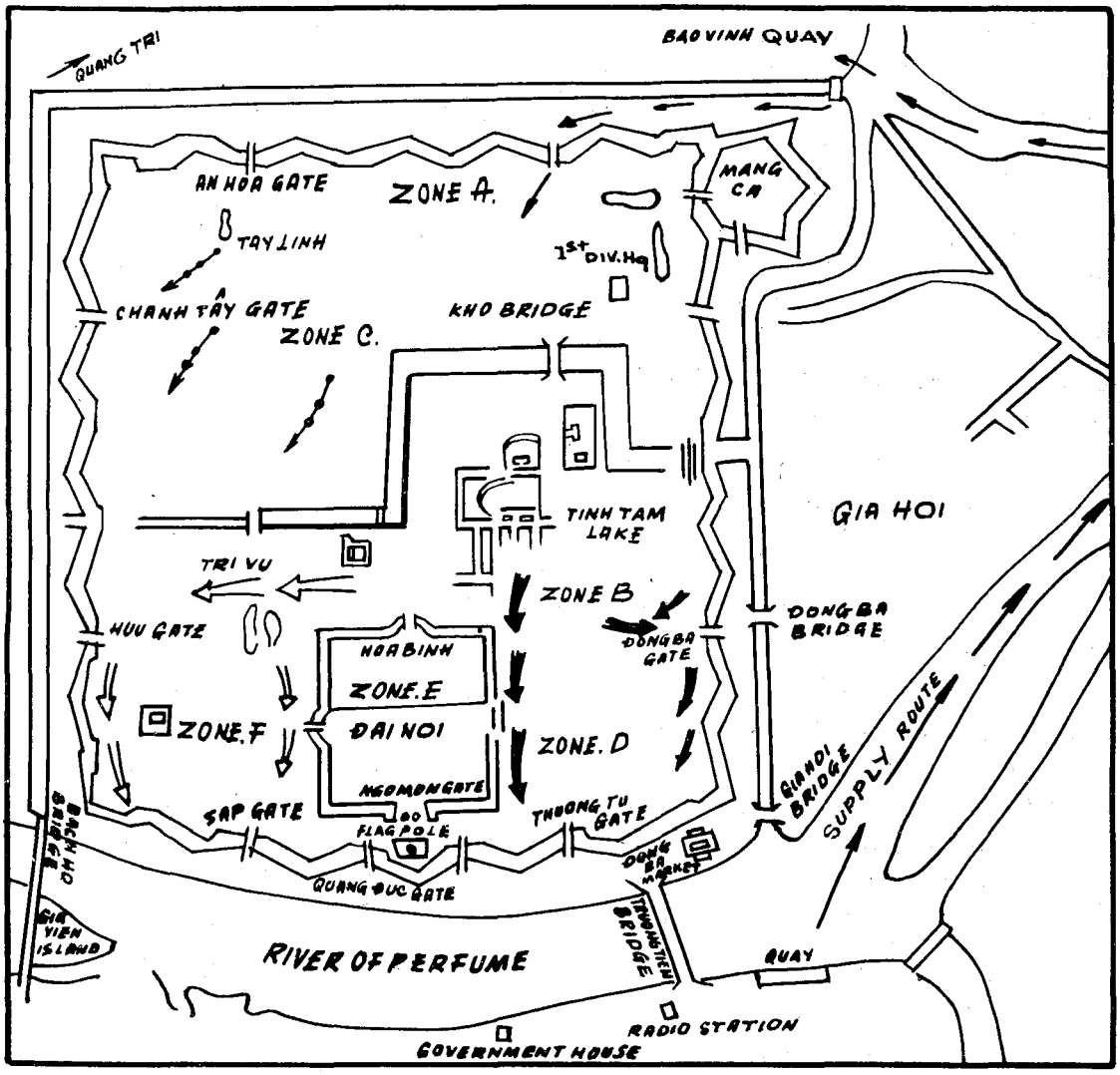
Fair weather lasted about three days favoring the airlift of the main force of the Vietnamese Marine Battle Group A from Saigon to relieve the badly exhausted Vietnamese airborne. The Marines landed at Phu Bai airfield. From here they moved to the pier which is on the right bank of the Perfume River, then they used landing craft to move over to Bao Vinh quay. Two of the Battle Group's three battalions moved safety into the Citadel on Feb. 12.

Battle Group A was commanded by Maj. Hoang Thong, assisted by Maj. Luong.

The Battle Group's First Battalion, under the command of Maj. Phan Van Thang, and Fifth Battalion, under the command of Maj. Pham Van Nha, started the Group's Operation Song Than 739/68 within the walls of the century-old Citadel. It may be worthy of note that just before initiating their fighting in Hue this battle Group had scored a major victory in Cai Lay and Go Vap during the enemy's Tet offensive. These districts were some 40 miles south and three miles north of Saigon, respectively.

The second stage of the operation to liberate the Citadel was conducted in six operational areas A, B, C, D, E and F (see chart of operation, stage II).

Area A was the northeastern corner of the Citadel



Water supply line

Advance of U. S. Marine Battalion 1/5

Advance of the Task Force A (Vietnamese Marines)

Advance of the Third Infantry Regiment

Zone A : 1st Infantry Division Headquarters

Zone B : Occupied by friendly forces

Zone C : TAOR of the 3rd Regiment

Zone E : Area as occupied by enemy troops

Zone D : TAOR of U. S. Marine force

Zone F : RVN Marine TAOR

including the Smaller and Greater Mang Ca areas. Here the Command of the 11th Tactical Area and of the First Infantry Division made their headquarters. This area was entirely under government control and its security was handled by the Command's guard garrison. The backgate of this area was the only way to Bao Vinh quay and the route over which friendly supplies and reinforcements were funnelled into the Command headquarters.

Area B covered the eastern side of the Citadel. Just outside of this area the enemy still controlled the Dong Ba market place.

Area C was the northwestern corner of the Citadel and included the Tay Loc and Tay Linh sections which were being cleared by the Third Infantry Regiment under the command of Lt. Col. Phan Ba Hoa. The West gate of the Citadel in this area was still under enemy control.

Area D bordered on Mai Thuc Loan street leading to Dong Ba gate in the north, on Nguyen Thanh street in the east, on the walls of the Imperial Palace in the west, and on part of the Ong Ich Khiem street and the Thuong Tu gate in the south. The sweep of Area D was entrusted to the 1/5 US Marine Battalion, which had some 1,000 seasoned soldiers equipped with modern weapons ranging up to medium and large artillery pieces. This US Marine battalion maneuvered into the Citadel on Feb. 10 and 11. It was deployed on Mai Thuc Loan, Nguyen Thanh and Dinh Bo Linh streets and adjoining areas in order to close in on enemy positions in the middle of Area D.

Area E was the Imperial Palace proper, which was still controlled by the enemy. The palace was regarded as the enemy's key tactical base. The enemy set up powerful machinegun nests on the high walls around the palace in order to hamper the friendly forces' advance from all four sided. The Ngo Mon and Phu Van Lau gates of the Imperial Palace were also in enemy hands. The enemy hung large flags from these gates.

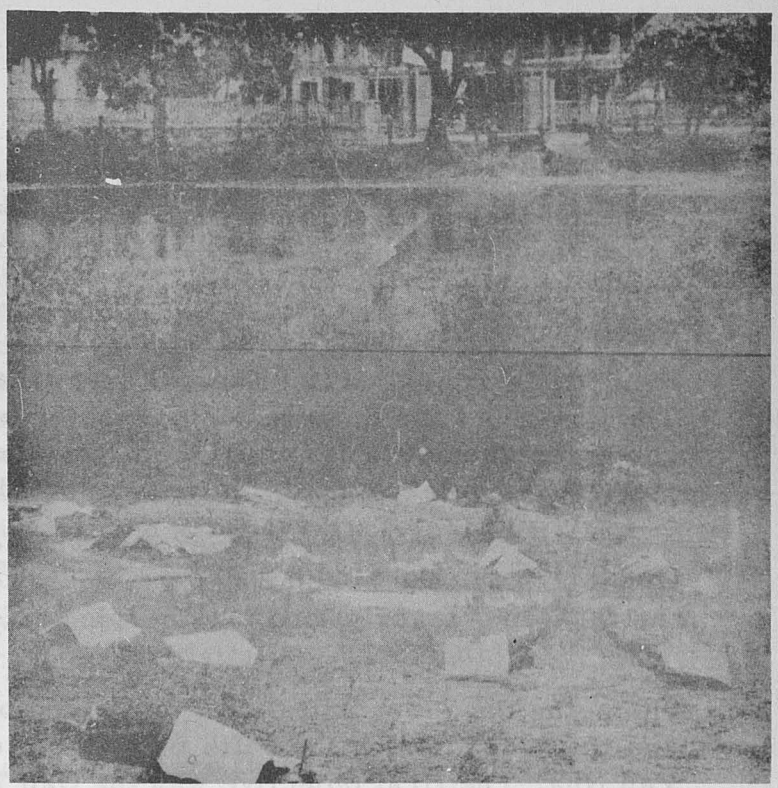
Area F was the southwestern corner of the Citadel and the operational area of the Marine Battle Group A. It included the populated sections of Tri Vu and Thuan Cat bordering on Trieu Quang Phuc street in the North, Ton That Thiep street in the West, Le Huan street in the East and Tran Binh Trong street leading to Bach Ho bridge in the South.



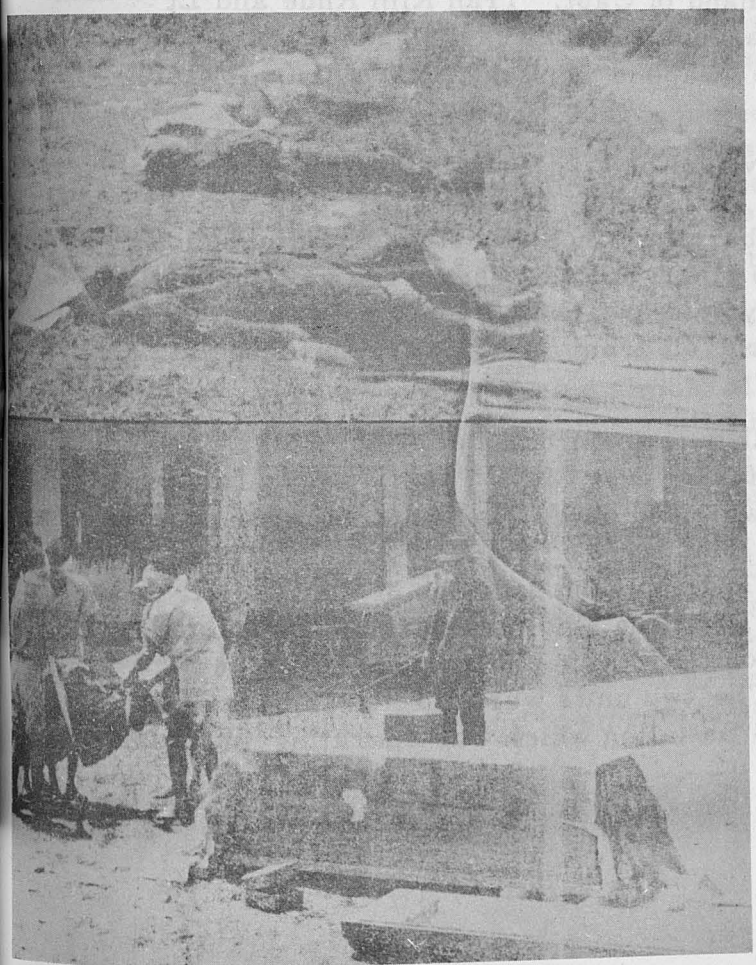
Dai Noi area following the allied counterattack

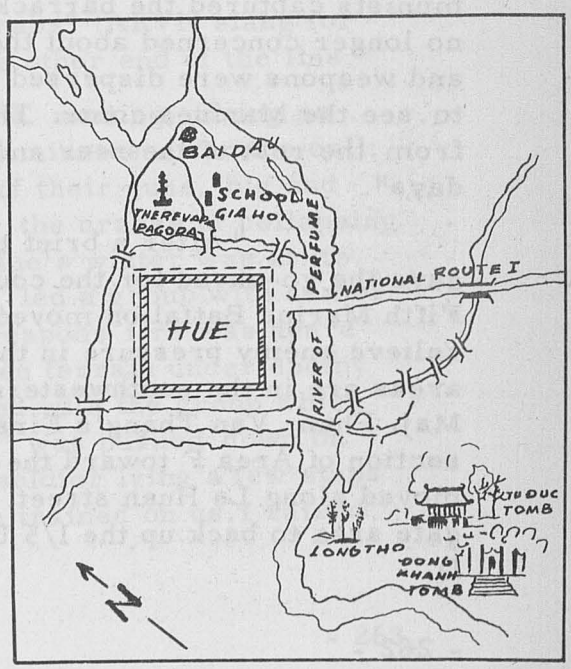


Ontos tanks with 106mm recoilless rifles were used in the liberation of the former imperial capital.



The Gia Long high school where over 20 mass graves were located.





SITES OF MASS GRAVES IN HUE

The Areas C, D and F were contested areas at this time. Of these three, Area E or the Imperial Palace was entirely under the control of enemy forces. These forces also controlled vantage points in the southeastern and southern section of the Citadel walls.

The entire Citadel area is about ten square kilometers. The combined Vietnamese-American forces operating in these three contested areas (C, D and F) included seven battalions. The troops stationed in Areas A and B were not included.

Reporter Nguyen Tu, who covered the Marine Battle Group A since the beginning of its Operation Song Than 739/68, gave the following description of its heroic performance during the battle :

"Battle Group A was divided into two columns, the first one being the First Battalion commanded by Maj. Phan Van Thang, and the second being the Fifth Battalion, commanded by Maj. Pham Van Nha. The first objective was the Cao Thang barrack, home of the First ordnance Company which became a frontline base. The barrack, which had been stubbornly defended for fifteen days by some eighty soldiers under the command of Capt. Tran Kim Khue and Lt Nguyen Van Cap, included a warehouse with a large quantity of ammunition and weapons. Among the weapons were nearly 1,400 up-to-date M16 automatic rifles.

" Lt. Cap said it would be a "great disaster" if the Communists captured the barrack. Both Capt. Khue and Lt. Cap were no longer concerned about the barrack since the stocked ammunition and weapons were dispersed to other places. They were very happy to see the Marines come. They said "we had been entirely isolated from the rest of the rear and cut off from our families for fifteen days".

" After a brief talk with the ordnance officers Maj. Thong gave the go-ahead for the counter-attack. Maj. Pham Van Nha's Fifth Marine Battalion moved west and down Ton That Thiep street to relieve enemy pressure in the East gate and Sap gate areas. These areas are in the southwestern and southern sections of the Citadel. Maj. Phan Van Thang's First Battalion also moved from the eastern section of Area F toward the southern corner of the Citadel. They moved along Le Huan street. The two units were to meet in the Sap gate area to back up the 1/5 US Battalion which was operating in Area D.

"Newsmen covering the operation of the Vietnamese Marines drew lots to see who would go with the advance reconnaissance company. Maj. Thang jokingly said he did not want to see newsmen die covering his battle. He notified his men over the radio that he was sending out "a child" whom someone must meet and escort down the road. By "child" he meant a good comrade in arms, a friend or similar expression. The word did not imply anything derogatory. It's Vietnamese army slang. A Marine took me to the actual battle area fifteen minutes later. The area was a maze of torn up trees, broken ducts, zigzagging trenches, collapsed houses and the like. The combat-ready Marines were grimly waiting for the assault signals. They were in groups from two to half a dozen men.

" The 4th Marine Company, led by Lt. Nguyen Xuan Tong, was the advance recon company of the 1st Battalion. The youthful officer was poring over a field map. He showed me enemy positions on the little map. He said one of these positions was in a pagoda and another in a school, roughly 30 and 60 meters from where we were. A burst of submachinegun fire made us lower our heads way down. This burst was followed by a big explosion right behind our line, less than ten meters away. Mud, broken bricks, dust, debris of all sorts, blown up by the blast, landed right on our heads. Only then did I realize that my damn heavy helmet was useful.

" Dusty-faced Lt. Tong shouted at his radio men asking them whether they had asked for artillery support. When the answer was negative he and his men quickly realized that it was an enemy rocket. Over the radio he called for three "crabs" (ARVN slang for tanks). "Yes, ready" was the answer from the other end of the line.

" Lt. Tong's 4th company lay low, waiting, firing no shots until the "crabs" showed up - only three minutes after the call. The tanks moved carefully, firing almost all of their guns, big and small. It was a deafening sound punctuated by the cracks of collapsing trees and walls. It was hazy and cold since Hue's winter was at its height. One of Lt. Tong's men, 3rd Lt. Nhut, led a group with armor support to take over the pagoda. Automatic weapons fire was heard all around the place, moving 30 meters in open terrain under enemy fire seemed like moving 3 kilometers. I moved with the group which advanced in a line formation. All of a sudden I was pushed down on the ground. I turned aside and saw a Marine soldier lying a few steps away, grinning and pointing to an enemy gun trained on us. I raised a hand as a thank-you sign.

" I was lying in an open field. I realized I was dangerously exposed to enemy fire. Looking around for a possible shelter, I found to my chagrin only one papaya tree the size of my leg. Better little cover than none. I decided to crawl to the foot of the fragile tree to get concealment from enemy observation rather than murderous enemy AK bullets, which could easily pierce through it. I corrected my helmet, grabbed my damn old still camera and then did the kind of job I had not done for several months - crawling, crawling very low. It was pretty good exercice anyway. I managed to reach the papaya tree after all. The firefight continued to rage. No sooner could I take a little rest and a deep sigh of relief than the group leader, Nhu, shouted out an assault order. "Forward, forward..." the shouts almost drowned out the scattered gunfire. The group stormed the pagoda. It was empty of enemy but full of broken pieces of religious furniture and, last but not least, empty cartridges.

" The enemy withdrew to a nearby school house and an adjoining abandoned civilian house which stood halfway between the pagoda and the school. I was mopping the sweat and dust from my face when the sound of incoming jet bombers was heard. "Whoosh" and then "boom, boom...". Dust, broken tile, almost everything not cemented to the roof of the pagoda rained on our heads and the floor. The bombs scored direct hits on enemy positions between 100 and 150 meters away. Fragments landed near the pagoda where the Marine assault group was waiting for another assault signal. One or two landed right in front of me, well inside the pagoda. Curiously, I touched one black piece of metal. It was as hot as though it just had come from a melting pot.

" I sat in a corner of the bullet-scarred pagoda for five minutes. The lieutenant's radio was in operation again, directing the close air support consisting of the bombing and strafing runs by the jet fighters. Not one bomb, rocket or round of cannon hit the friendly position. I overheard a brief radio conversation in which it was reported that another Marine group succeeded in destroying an enemy bunker with some fifteen enemy in it. All were killed. I wanted to go there to take a few shots of the enemy bodies. One Marine told me not to go until the Marines could knock out the enemy positions in the house and the school. Furthermore, he said, it was too dark in the bunker for me to get any good snapshots. We were talking when some people in our rank yelled : "Lt Nhut is dashing toward the enemy position. Why ? No assault signal yet ? ..." Everyone just

looked stunned. The soldiers who shouted at him to stop never had a chance to finish their warnings. Nearby halfway between the house and the pagoda, 15 meters away, the lieutenant was cut down by bursts of enemy submachinegun fire. Some soldiers turned their heads away overcome by emotions. Others attempted to dash out to recover his body but none could budge an inch. The bursts of enemy automatic fire were heavy enough to pin them all down. I heard Lt. Tong shout over the radio : "I never told anyone to charge ahead yet. I told everyone to wait until the occupation of the pagoda". Then I heard him report over the radio to his commanding officer about the loss of "a big child" and his men's inability to recover his body as yet. He reported so in an obviously emotional voice.

"From the top of the pagoda's central altar Lord Buddha detachedly and quietly witnessed the continuing human tragedy right from the very beginning. The gunfire increased in pace and intensity on both sides. The M.16s of the Marines almost drowned out the whistling enemy AK s. A few Marines, under covering fire, managed to bring the body of Third Lieutenant Nhut back into the pagoda. The evacuation operation lasted fifteen minutes. The lieutenant's body was quickly placed on a waiting stretcher. He was fatally hit in his heart, the bullet piercing through the left soft side of his flak jacket. Laid to rest on the stretcher, his head turned a bit on one side, his eyes tightly closed, his limbs spread wide and loose, his face just looked as if nothing had happened to him. Somebody had wrapped his body with a poncho. A soldier said Lt Nhut had proven very courageous in several actions. He had led the way in several assaults on enemy positions, namely in the Cai Lay battle shortly before Hue. In Cai Lay Lt Nhut and his fellow soldiers inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy and seized as many as 95 weapons. That was all of the story of the dead lieutenant, the soldier could recount. Brief and simple as it was, the soldier's speech sounded to me much more significant than, say, a long eulogy. Emptily and also reverantly I followed the stretcher, which was carried out of the pagoda by four soldiers. One of the soldiers was carrying the dead man's M.16 rifle.

"Right on the blood-stained little piece of lawn where Lt Nhut met death someone had left a helmet upside down. I did not know for sure whether it was Lt Nhut's. I guessed it was. It was covered by a piece of old, almost threadbare fabric with some unprofessional drawings and sketches as well as some signatures. I picked it up and saw two lines of handwriting "Live beside you,

darling, die beside buddies". I later found out that this was almost a slogan, stressing the spirit of dedication and sacrifice of the 4th Company as well as that of the entire Marine Battle Group A.

" A soldier died. Another soldier stepped forward to take his place. The firefight continued with increasing ferocity, from house to house, from garden to garden, from street to street".

The Vietnamese and American forces were pledged to annihilate the enemy in the Citadel at all costs. Wave after wave of US Marine jet fighters rained bombs, rockets and cannon fire on enemy positions for two days running. On Feb 14, for the first time in the 16-day-old Hue battle, airstrikes were directed at enemy positions dug into the thick rock and brick walls of the Citadel. The ordnance expended included napalm bombs, three-inch rockets, tear gas bombs and high explosive fragmentary bombs weighing up to 750 pounds.

The enemy continued to hold out from entrenched positions along the great walls encompassing the northeast and southwest sections of the Citadel. Many friendly assault waves were repulsed.

The battle for Hue was made even more arduous for the friendly forces by poor weather - low cloud ceilings, nippingly cold temperatures, etc. Furthermore the friendly forces were eager to reduce civilian casualties and avoid as much destruction of property as possible. Most of the roads and streets leading to enemy positions were barricaded by him with stolen pieces of furniture, windows, doors etc... The enemy delivered sniper fire against friendly troops from behind these barricades.

Throughout the day of Feb 16 fighting continued in its familiar pace and ferocity inside the Citadel. American artillery fired white phosphorous shells. Crusader jet fighters conducted massive bomb and rocket strikes against enemy positions. Houses, buildings, walls collapsed and burst into flames, lighting part of the ancient capital city that night.

The 1/5 US Marine Battalion pushed back an enemy force to the south in order to trap it within the crossfire of the friendly forces positioned on both sides of the Perfume River. American tanks also maneuvered into the southern end of the Citadel and struck the enemy dug in on the flanks of the Citadel walls.

The main enemy pocket of resistance continued to be the one entrenched inside the old Imperial Palace. The enemy used the few tanks he had captured at the initial stage of the battle to reinforce his defensive positions around the palace.

Part of the enemy force maneuvered close to the Dong Ba - Gia Hoi intersection and positioned mortars to seal off the river supply routes of the friendly forces. This new enemy move forced the allied commanders to shell his positions and to temporarily helilift most of the badly needed supplies and equipment. Fires broke out in the Dong Ba and Gia Hoi sections with columns of smoke billowing into the skies of Hue and visible from miles away.

The Vietnamese Marine Battle Group engaged a fairly big enemy force around noon Feb 16 while pressing toward the western end of the Citadel. Thirty one enemy bodies were counted. Six weapons and some explosives were seized. The Marines only suffered light casualties.

The adverse weather conditions on Feb 18 made friendly military operations very difficult by slowing down the advance of friendly troops and hampering the helilift of supplies. One friendly convoy from Phu Bai came under enemy mortar fire. Though no substantial progress was made during the day between 30 and 35 enemy were killed in scattered engagements. Bad weather, low cloud ceilings (about 150 meters) and poor visibility because of fog, made all air combat support impossible. Shortly after dark some enemy movements were spotted on the mid river islet. The purpose of the movements was unknown.

Around 0430 h. , Feb 19, two enemy battalions launched an assault on the first Marine Battalion in the southwestern section of the Citadel after softening up the Marine positions with some 300 rounds of 82mm mortar and B.40 rockets. Vietnamese Marine 105mm howitzer positions from the Mang Ca area responded with some 2,000 rounds.

Nearly three weeks had passed since the fierce counter-offensive of the friendly forces had begun. The enemy began to give indications of his withdrawal plan. Ranking enemy officers and political leaders vanished from the imperial palace area, mostly under cover of darkness. It was thought they slipped out through Tran Hung Dao street and the Gia Hoi bridge. The enemy's brief maneuver spotted on the islet the night before was apparently a diversionary move.

As of Feb 19, the Marines alone accounted for 180 enemy killed and 84 weapons seized while suffering only light casualties.

By Feb 20 only an estimated 350 enemy still held out within the walls of the Citadel.

Before the attack on the remnants of the enemy in the Citadel our psywar teams called on them to surrender over their high-powered loudspeakers. Even fiercer fire from enemy positions responded to the message. The Marines conducted their final attack in the northwest-southwest direction. The enemy was solidly entrenched in foxholes, trenches and bunkers which were dug into the thick walls of the Citadel.

Three battalions of the 1st US Aircav Division mounted an assault on a village five kilometers northwest of Hue city on the morning of Feb 21. The village was believed to be employed by the enemy as a staging and supply base for his forces operating in Hue. The enemy was firmly entrenched and held out ferociously. The fight cost the enemy 163 killed, four suspects captured for interrogation and 31 weapons seized. American troops lost 12 killed and 137 wounded in the action.

On the morning of Feb 22, in order to end the devastating Hue battle as soon as possible, the 1st ARVN Infantry Division sent two Ranger battalions to reinforce the Marines and Infantry units in the city. These were the 39th and 21st Ranger Battalions. The 21st had just arrived from pre-Tet operation in the Khe Sanh valley. These two battalions were assigned to recapture the Gia Hoi section

On the morning of Feb 22 loudspeakers were used once more to call on enemy remnants to surrender and to request that they save the lives of the civilians trapped in the fighting by allowing them to get out of the fighting zone. The enemy complied and let the civilians go. They came out in small groups each carrying one or several white flags. They were taken across the Perfume River aboard junks, sampans, anything that could float and move, toward refugee centers on the southern bank of the river.

Around noon on Feb 23 two Vietnamese Marine companies recaptured the Right gate of the Citadel after wiping out an enemy force of 31 men with one BAR and nine individual weapons. The Marines had only one man wounded.

Another Marine unit engaged an unknown-sized enemy force in the southwestern section of the Citadel and killed ten of the enemy. The Marines suffered no casualties. American Marines captured a single storied structure in the southeastern section. From this structure they controlled the city's main bridge, called Trang Tien or Nguyen Hoang bridge.

Additional US Marine reinforcements were helilifted into the walled imperial city on the same day amidst heavy enemy ground fire.

On the morning of Feb 24 the Marine Battle Group A moved from the West gate area toward three objectives. The objectives were Nam Dai, Nha Do gate and the Ton That Thiep Street area.

The 4th Marine Battalion was assigned to storm the Nam Dai positions from which the solidly entrenched Communist guerrillas had been holding out for 12 days. The Marines did not overrun these enemy positions until 2100h. They killed 85 enemy and seized 30 assorted weapons.

The 1st Marine Battalion had to employ tear gas to dislodge the enemy from his bunkers, foxholes and trenches. The Marines also had to engaged the enemy in a fierce hand-to-hand fight. This fight caused the outnumbered, exhausted enemy to lose 72 killed, 33 assorted weapons and two telephones were seized.

The 5th Marines wiped out the enemy positions in the Ton That Thiep area much sooner than the other two battalions seize their objectives. They accounted for 26 enemy killed and five weapons seized, including two anti-aircraft machineguns.

At the same time the Marine Battle Group A gave combat support to a friendly unit in the recapture of the Phu Van Lau flagpole. That day, and for the first time in the 25-day-old Hue battle, the Vietnamese flag was flown again atop the giant, stately flagpole. The enemy flag was pulled down around 0400 h. on Feb. 24.

On the same memorable day the Vietnamese Marines advanced into the Imperial Palace proper which the demoralized enemy had abandoned and from which they had fled to the southern wall of the Citadel.

On Feb 25 the Rangers also regained complete control of the Gia Hoi area. The enemy had abandoned this area after he had



The Vietnamese national flag about to be hoisted at the flagpole amid still heavy fighting.



RVN troops assaulting remaining Viet Cong entrenched in the Imperial Palace.

lost the Imperial Palace. Property destruction was comparatively small in the area but civilian casualties were considered high. Most of the casualties were caused by the enemy through massacres, murders etc. Scores of civilians had been murdered in cold blood. They had been simultaneously murdered by bursts of submachinegun fire or simply buried alive in mass graves.

The battle for Hue was considered over on the 26th day. The friendly forces, Vietnamese and American, started a series of outwards sweep operations from their recaptured positions in town. The city was practically calm although gunfire was still heard almost continuously. Friendly artillery units fired all day and night. The average local citizen thought that although the city itself had been secured by friendly troops the war was far from finished. The city was still vulnerable to enemy attack. An estimated five enemy divisions still refused to withdraw from the area. According to American military sources some 2,500 enemy were killed. The Communists, however, admitted to only 1,042 killed and failed to disclose the total of their wounded. On the allied side 213 Vietnamese troops were killed and 879 wounded. The American forces suffered 53 killed and 380 wounded in action.

B.- THE ANCIENT CAPITAL IN DISTRESS

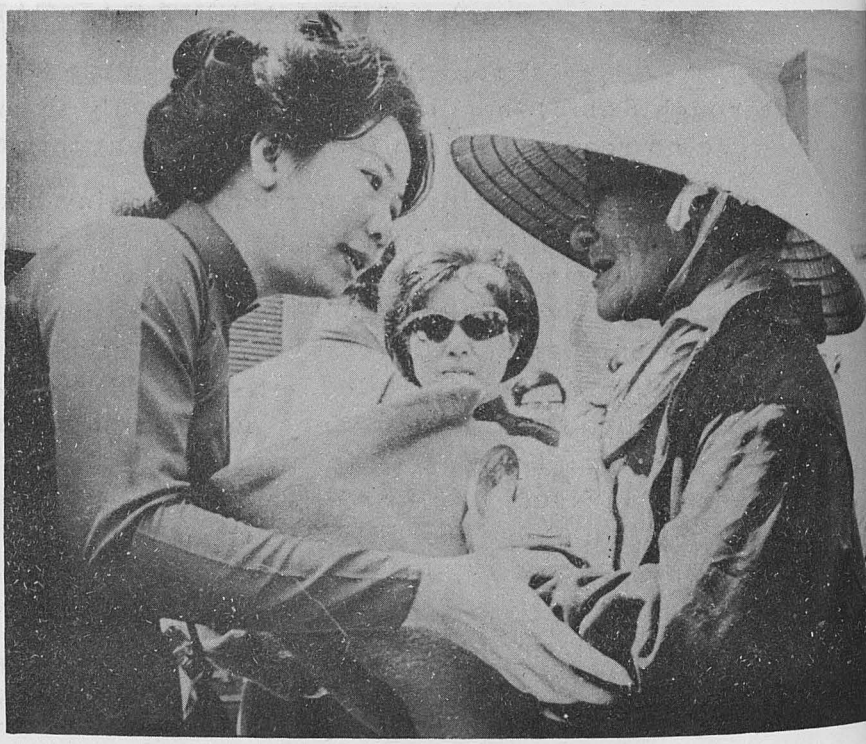
From the second through the fourth day of Tet (Jan 31 through Feb 2) the Viet Cong moved freely in the streets of Hue. There were no reactions from friendly forces at this time.

During this period the enemy had a field day making political propaganda for what he called the People's Alliance for Democracy and Freedom. On the Quang Tri - Thua Thien front this organization was led by the former Hue University teacher Le Van Hao. A number of college students and civilians, who had participated in the abortive Buddhist-led anti-government campaigns in previous years, supported the Alliance and played a fairly active part in its Hue chapter. Leading student members of the Alliance included Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong and Hoang Phu Ngoc Anh. There had been rumors that Professor Hao had sneaked out of town three days before Tet Day, or Jan 27, to join the Viet Cong.

People blamed the high rate of civilian murders on resident informers acting in response to personal feuds over political disputes in preceding years. A number of civilian agencies held out



President Nguyen Van Thieu immediately visited the population of Hue after the liberation of the city (2 February 1968)



Mrs. Nguyen Van Thieu talking to an old Hue resident.



LTG Hoang Xuan Lam,
I Corps Commander.

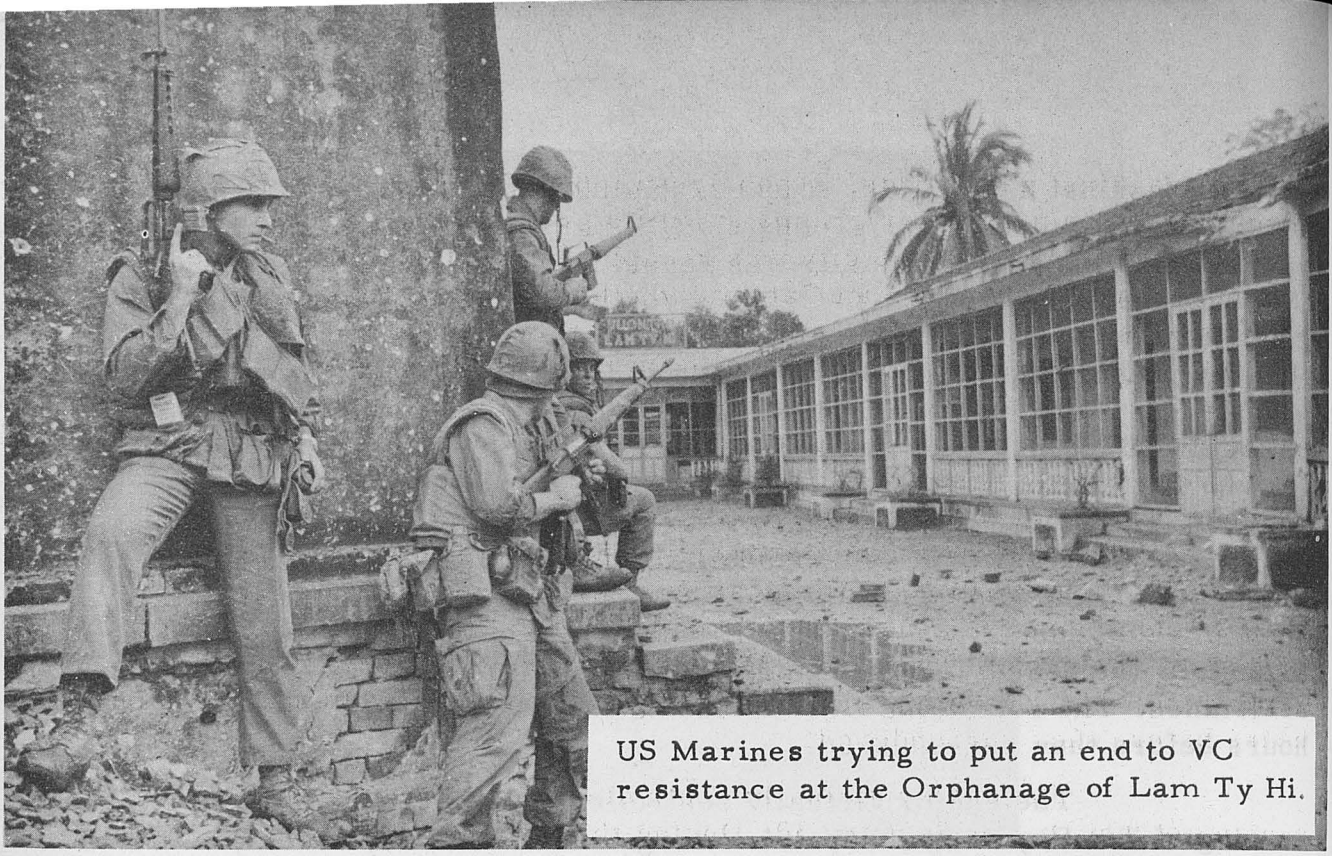
valiantly against heavy odds. A poorly equipped Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang platoon, among other groups stood its grounds at the Thanh Nhon school until this part of the city was recaptured by friendly forces. One hundred Phu Cam Roman Catholic youths fought for four days on end until they ran out of ammunition and had to withdraw to Phu Bai. Had they been given sufficient ammunition they would certainly not have let the Phu Cam area fall into enemy hands. Some American nationals, living in a house near the Nam Giao bridge, held out valiantly for two days and refused to surrender. They were all killed, one after another. Their bravery won them the great admiration of the people of Hue. Another group of American civilians, employees of the Industrial Relations Department, living at No 7 Ly Thuong Kiet, inflicted such si-eable enemy casualties that the enemy had to use B.40 rockets to destroy the house. Two of the seven died in the early stages of the resistance. The remaining five, including two women, held out for 24 hours before they surrendered.

The enemy virtually controlled the entire city on the evening of Tet Day or January 30. During the next two days enemy troops and agents moved about in the city freely. They were controlling the people as if they were operating in VC territory.

The VC called people out of their homes to "political study meetings", classified them into categories - civil servants, soldiers, police and just plain citizens. Except for the last category all the people summoned were detained overnight at the Government Delegate's office building on the right bank of the Perfume River. They were allowed to go home the next morning.

People speculated that the enemy was starting a three-stage mass arrest and murder scheme. The case mentioned above was a lighter one while the serious case involved those civilians detained in the Gia Hoi area which was under even firmer enemy control. In this area the enemy succeeded in carrying out all of the three stages of his sinister scheme.

First he sealed off the occupied area, herding the people together and classifying them into categories. The just plain citizen category was told to form civic organizations. This process was designed to help the enemy have tight control on the populace. Each of the organizations had a representative to take orders from the enemy. These plain citizens were told to continue to work normally and to keep public order. Then enemy troops and agents came to each house confiscating all private radio in an apparent effort to cut



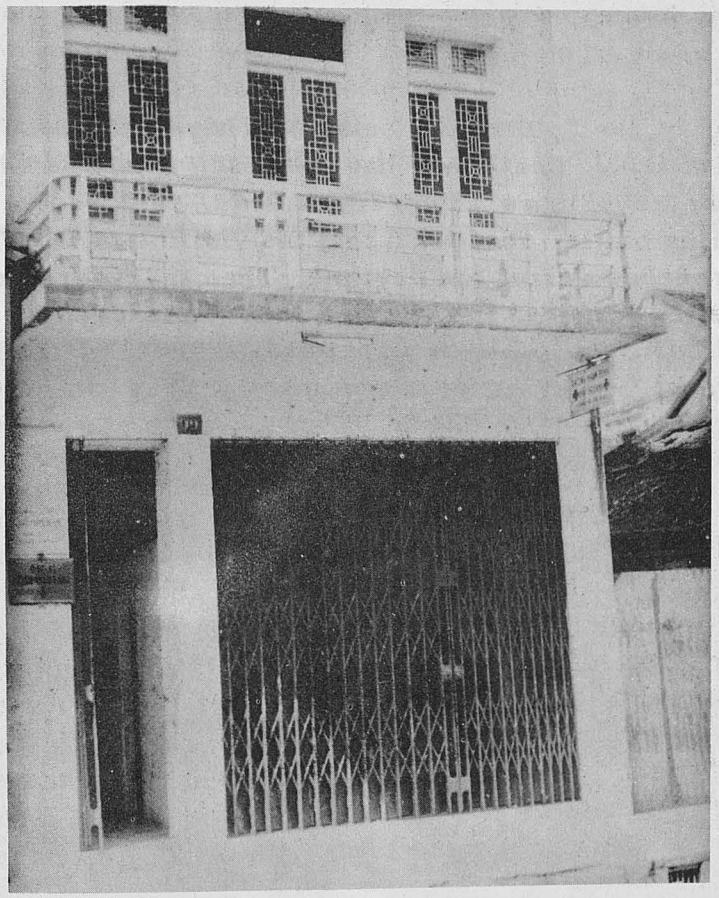
US Marines trying to put an end to VC resistance at the Orphanage of Lam Ty Hi.



The An Cuu Market following a bombing raid



The temporary tomb of Mr. Tran Dinh Phuong, former Deputy Province Chief for Administration Affair in Thua Thien.



The surgery and private home of Lt. Doctor Nguyen Xuan Lang, who could have lived had he not tried to take refuge elsewhere.

the people off from the outside world. At the same time they spread the rumor that the entire Thua Thien province and the whole country had come under their control.

In the next step they called on all national government employees, such as public servants, soldiers and police, to surrender their individual weapons and to report to their military place of duty in order to benefit from clemency measures. Failing to comply they would have to face severe punishment. Large numbers of such people turned themselves and their weapons in to the Communists and were allowed to freely return and stay home for two days. None were forced to do anything for the enemy. The move was apparently designed to deceive the public.

The third stage was the actual mass arrest and terror drive against these former employees of the local government.

After these two days of having been freed people were asked to attend "political meetings" by the enemy cadremen who came to each of their homes. A number of people never came back or were ever heard of again. The number of "missing" increased with each passing day. These people had been murdered somewhere in the city after reporting to the "political meetings". They had never suspected they would meet tragic death; nor had they been aware of the time they were to die. Survivors and enemy agents, captured in the later stages of the Hue battle, recounted that the victims had been told to dig air raid trenches during the daytime. Then they were actually led to these so-called trenches in the night to be massacred by submachine-gun fire or simply buried alive. Apparently the victims had never suspected they were digging their own mass graves. In many cases the victims were murdered and shoved into the graves soon after they had finished digging.

An estimated 1,000 people were murdered and massacred in this way by the Viet Cong in the suburbs of Hue. They had been public servants, soldiers and those who had experienced personal feuds with pro-Communist elements during the political disturbances in preceding years. Major mass graves were later found at the Gia Hoi high school, the Tang Quang Tu pagoda, the Bai Dau area (some 30 mass graves here alone) and Emperor Tu Duc's tomb (another 20 mass graves here). The bodies recovered from these and other mass graves showed evidence of atrocious, painful deaths. A number of bodies were headless or limbless - or both. Others had their hands



The body of West German Doctor Raimund Discher as found in one of the many mass graves in Hue.



The French people took to the streets more than once to denounce the Viet Cong for the many Communist crimes in Hue.

tied behind their backs. Still others were tied together in groups of tens or fifteens, indicating that the victims had been shoved into the mass graves and buried alive.

Among the known massacres in which the victims were buried alive or died similarily painful deaths, was the case involving three West German teachers of the Hue Medical School and the wife of one of them. The victims were Dr and Mrs Hort Gunther Krainich, Dr Alois Alterkoster and Dr Raimund Discher. They had come to Vietnam to teach at the Hue University under a West German technical aid program. They were abducted on Jan 31 or on Tet Day during the first hours of the enemy offensive on the city.

When they stormed the Hue University compound enemy troops and agents did not arrest the Vietnamese teachers apparently because one of their top leaders, Prof. Le Van Hao, had been one of their colleagues only a few days earlier. The graves of the West German professors were not found until April. These cold-blooded murders aroused the conscience and indignation of the entired civilized world. Hardly anyone had ever believed that the Viet Cong were barbarous enough to murder servants of charity and welfare.

These fanatical massacres of defenseless people were bitterly condemned by public opinion and the press around the world. The London Times ran a banner headline protesting these mass executions. During the course of one of these execution reporter Steward Harris met tragic death. In the French newspaper Minute, reporter Yves Gautron wrote that no one could tolerate these savage acts of Communist terrorism against the innocent people in Hue. In France students held a mass protest rally at the Ternes Square to condemn these atrocities.

Vietnamese officials killed during the Hue tragedy included the late Hue Deputy Mayor Tran Dinh Phuong, the late Public Prosecutor of the Thua Thien field court Maj Buu Thanh, the late Justice of the Hue Court of Appeals Nguyen Khoa Hoang and his lawyer son. Deputy Mayor Phuong was murdered right in front of his home. He was temporarily buried eight days later at the same place where he was shot. Maj Thanh was abducted and never heard of again. Justice Hoang was abducted from his home and his son was also led away while pleading for the release of his father.

Maj Tran Huu Bao, deputy province chief of Thua Thien, was wounded leading a defensive action against an enemy assault on

the Thua Thien sector command headquarters around 0300 hrs. Jan 31.

Witnesses in Hue recounted that at the early stages of the enemy occupation enemy troops were forbidden to violate people's property. Some of them even provided food to the people. Purportedly they even used captured Vietnamese military trucks to carry rice from government warehouses to each home on the third day of Tet as "a Tet gift" from the socalled people's liberation army. Only a few people really received this kind of gift. This symbolical gesture on the part of the enemy was aimed at winning the friendship of the local people. Apparently it achieved its objectives with some naive people.

The behavior and policies of the enemy in the latter days of occupation, resulting in the losses of innumerable civilian lives and great amounts of private property served as a blunt warning of communist savagery to the people of Hue. A lesson, a really bitter one, was taught them : Under no circumstances can a free people cooperate with Communism.

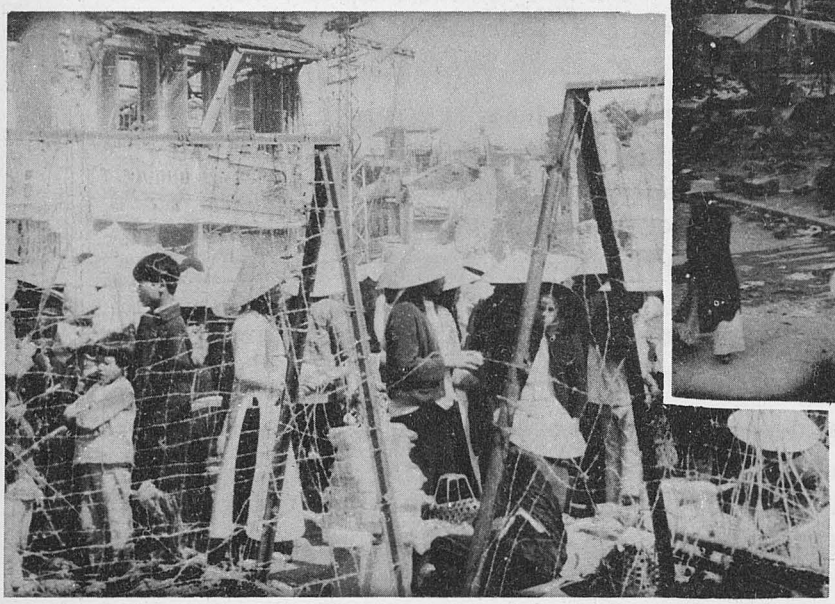
What was left in the path of war were scenes of sickening, almost irreparable destruction. The city was virtually reduced to rubble. Emaciated, haggard people wandered around, aimless, and bewildered. The evidence of the huge loss of human life was seen on the heads of housewives and children in the form of their mourning turbans as they were roaming about the streets shopping for meager, cheap food. They were also looking for what ever might be left usable among the rubble or they were just begging.

It was feared that the people of Hue might starve since surface supply routes were still unsafe and airlifts were difficult, sometimes impossible, due to adverse weather conditions.

Actually the people generally still had some food of their own. Their houses were destroyed or damaged by the fighting but their rice and other foodstuffs were saved.

In early March 1968 there were rumors that the local government headed by the Mayor had made a suspected deed concerning the distribution of rice from two governmental warehouse and the private Vien De company's warehouse. During this distribution of rice people were allowed to come and get as much as they could physically carry. It was said that the uncontrolled distribution of rice was an opportunity for the local government to clarify the Mayor's suspected action

With no more market, people gather in the open to exchange goods.

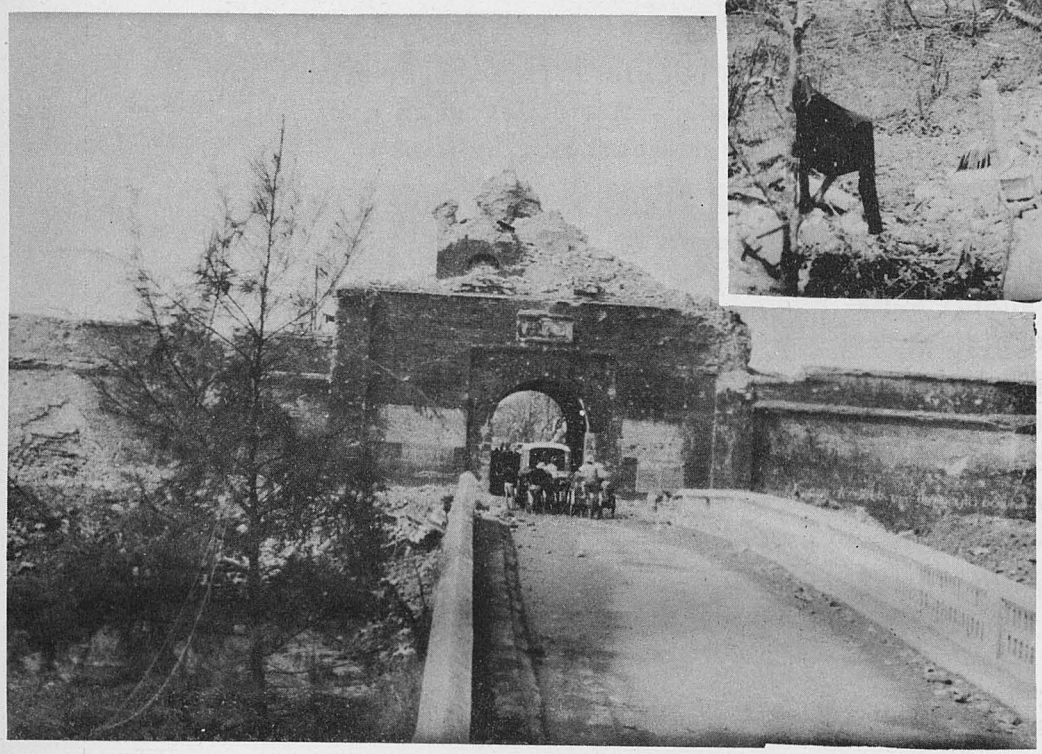




The Dong Ba Market after occupation of Hue.

The Nguyen Thanh area





AFTER "TET"

The Thuong Tu Ga

The rumors apparently originated from the excessively bitter feelings of the local people about the war and its deplorable aftermath. The rumors certainly would be more fully clarified by the government at a later date.

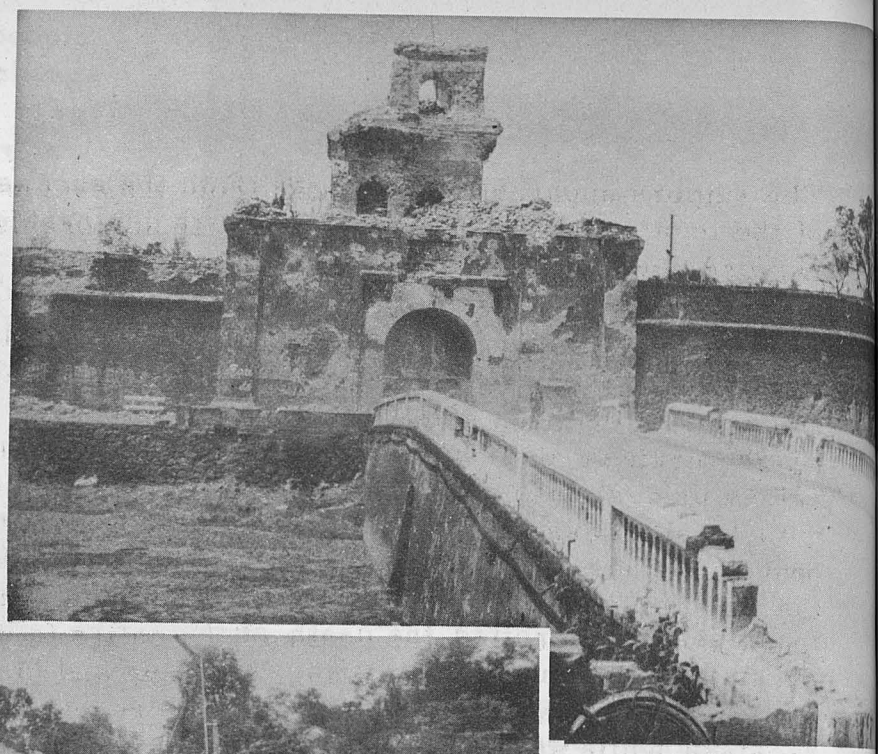
Some other foodstuffs and essentials besides rice were also scarce. Only surplus canned food and C-rations from allied stocks were seen on sale on the sidewalks of Hue. The few drug stores which survived the 26-day battle did a brisk business. Most of them raised prices deliberately, ignoring the sufferings of the impoverished unfortunate masses. People of the Hue were surprised to learn that owners of these stores prized money above humanity and acted against the conscience of civilized, well educated men. On the other hand many local people regretted the death of the entire family of a military physician, Lt Nguyen Xuan Lang. Dr Lang and his pharmacist wife Ton Nu Ai Quy and the couple's two children died of bullet wounds received while attempting to flee from their home on Phan Boi Chau street, which was also Mrs Ai Quy's drug store. Surprisingly enough, their house remained untouched by the war to become one of the city's very few such fortunate structures. People said that the youthful couple and their children would not have met tragic death, if they had stayed in their house throughout the battle. But who knows ?

Thievery and looting were widespread. War victims stole from their fellow suffers. All deserted houses were emptied of almost everything usable from kitchen utensils to furniture and valuables. Robbed victims sought to steal from others. Many houses sported scribbled signs saying "Occupied houses", the signs being designed to discourage prospective thieves.

Some eighty per cent of the city's houses and buildings were destroyed or damaged by the battle.

The quarter-square-mile Imperial Palace suffered extensive damage. The stately Ngo Mon gate, which took several rounds of mortar and cannon fire threatened to collapse. Its roof was badly torn.

The gold plate throne in the Palace was intact but the other pieces of furniture in the Imperial Hall were broken or knocked down among the debris on the floor. Most of the precious giant china vases, which were several centuries old, were broken or reduced to pieces by the blast waves of artillery and shellings. The Citadel 2-1/2 kilometer square, was practically left a shambles. The Nguyen Thanh street and adjoining areas were only an indiscriminate mass



The Dong Ba Gate





The Ben Ngu Bridge was only slightly damaged.





The Phu Cam bridge. It was to be rebuilt.

of rubble. The tall walls of the Citadel were torn at several places. The civilian battle casualties, excluding those civilians murdered or buried alive in mass graves by the enemy, were the highest in the city's history. Property destruction was the greatest since the birth of the city. Some 944 civilians were known killed and 784 wounded. The killed included 378 who died in the First Precinct or inside the walled Citadel, 400 in the city's Second Precinct on the left bank of the Perfume River, and 166 in the Third Precinct on the right bank of the river. Some 4,456 civilian houses were totally destroyed, 3,360 damaged by more than 50% and 2,757 damaged by less than 50%. Hardest hit and entirely destroyed were 2,815 structures in the Citadel, 895 on the left bank and 746 on the right bank. More than 50% damaged were 1,382 houses in the Citadel, 1,525 on the left bank and 453 on the right bank. Damaged less than 50% were 1,046 structures in the Citadel, 1,036 on the left bank and 673 on the right bank. On the average the bridges inside the city were damaged by 60%. The An Cuu bridge, blown by the enemy, required reconstruction. The Kho Ren, Phu Cam and Nam Giao bridges collapsed almost entirely. The Bach Ho railroad bridge lost one span. The Gia Hoi bridge received some mortar holes and was already repaired. The Kim Long bridge collapsed entirely and was rebuilt. The city's key steel and concrete Trang Tien bridge lost its two middle spans. This bridge became re-useable for pedestrians only when a pontoon was used to link the other spans together.

C. - THE ENEMY'S SCHEME FOR THE HUE OFFENSIVE

In carrying out his schemed attack on Hue the enemy had at his disposal an operational staff, two assault infantry regiments which were supported by the city-based secret agents and two additional infantry regiments. The latter served both as backup and replacement units.

The main force elements were the 5th Regiment and the fifth column namely the 5th Command of Hue headed by Nguyen Van and the 6th Regiment commanded by VC Lt. Col. Nguyen Trong Dan.

The reinforcing regiments were the 9th Regiment, commanded by VC Lt. Col. Di, and an element of the 8th Regiment. The 8th Regiment was an offspring of the Song Lo Regiment and was not brought into action until the later stages of the offensive. The 9th Regiment was also previously known as the Cu Chinh Lan Regiment which had been named after its late commander Cu Chinh Lan who died in the 1951 Operation Hoa Binh. Slogans praising the spirit of

Lan were scribbled on the wall of the Imperial City's Ngo Mon gate and could be seen in the wake of the Hue battle. This proved that several elements of the Lan regiment had participated in the Citadel battle under the banner of the 9th Regiment.

Twenty days before the actual offensive the enemy made preparation for the Hue offensive. The plan of his offensive was as follows :

The 5th Regiment, which included Battalions K4A and K4B, and the 21st sapper Battalion supported by the city-based agents, attacked the city from the south. The sappers infiltrated the city on the night of Jan 28 two days before Tet.

The 6th Regt included Battalions K1, K2 and K6, the 12th sapper Battalion and four support companies. The four support companies were C15, C16, C17, and C18, reinforced by the guerrilla company DKB plus local guerrilla elements from Huong Tra and Phong Dien districts and two sapper groups consisting of 40 men. This reinforced 6th Regiment had the mission to mount the offensive from the north. Its objectives were the 1st ARVN Infantry Division Command headquarters in the Greater Mang Ca area, the Tay Loc airfield and the Imperial Palace.

The offensive plan of this Regiment had been outlined as follows :

- General objective : the Citadel as a whole.
- Key targets and firing priority : the Mang Ca area and the airfield.
- The storming points : the Chanh Tay gate, the An Hoa gate, the northern section of the Citadel and the Mang Ca area.
- Next target : Huong Tra district town.
- The artillery targets : The ARVN artillery and armor positions in Tu Ha.
- Tactics : advance as close to the Citadel as possible; in case detected assault using all available fire power.
- Infiltration methods : cross the river to join at Cay Da Tru (or Tru banyan), use the banyan's pendant roots to climb up the Citadel wall and enter the Citadel; simultaneously use the underground drainage ducts to enter the Citadel disregard the fighting outside.

The enemy's advance scheme was carried out as follows :

The 5th Regiment crossed the river at the two ferry



The Trang Tien bridge had one of its spans destroyed forcing the population to use sampans to cross the River of Perfume



After the arrival of engineer troops, two narrow lanes were immediately launched for the people's use.



The treasury after the fighting



Post Office

points Khe Moc Nang and Dinh Mon on the night of Jan 30. It did not reach the city proper until 0700h.because one of its elements was ambushed by friendly troops at the Liem bridge intersection.

The 5th Regiment started out from the Nui Gio (Windy Mount) area about 12 kms west of Hue, moved northeastward through the Soc Chang Brook, assembled near the Truong Son outpost and crossed several ricefields to regroup at Coi Ke. Another enemy battalion joined the 5th Regiment to cross the Thong Cung Mountain. They regrouped at Thanh Khe hamlet, crossed Highway No 1 and were joined by two DKZ-75 companies. They split into columns, one positioning at La Chu and the other at Duc Buu - Ngo Tuong, just north of the Mang Ca camp.

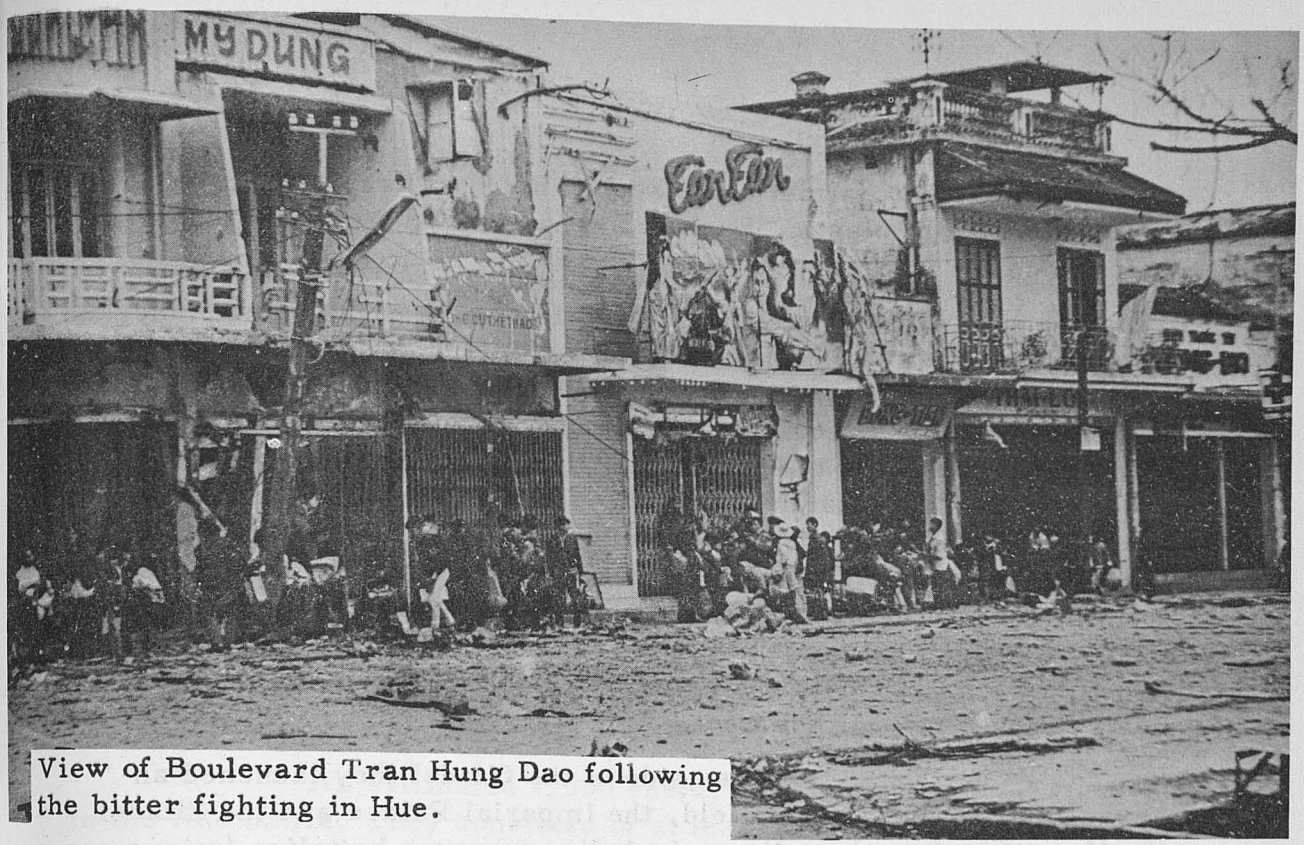
The 9th Regiment, which was a support and replacement unit, included the 416th and 418th Battalions moving from the Don Trau Mountain area, 20 kms west of Hue. It crossed the Bo River to the Thong Cung Mountain where it was reinforced by Battalion K6, 6th Regiment, and moved northeastward along the Van Trung Xa and Lieu Coc Phuong roads then through La Chu, Trieu Son Tay and Coi Ke successively to a staging area just northwest of the city.

In addition, the enemy set up a supply route, Route 12, leading to the north of the city to bring supplies in and wounded out of the city.

Finally the 8th Regiment sent one of its major element into the city from the northern side. The enemy's offensive plan had been plotted carefully.

According to enemy documents seized from the 6th Regiment by attacking the northern side of the Citadel they would attack the headquarters of the 1st ARVN Infantry Division Command and the An Hoa gate.

The enemy divided a sapper company of his into four groups of ten men each. Each group was equipped with two B40 and one B41 rocket launchers, AK and CKZ rifles. Each of the rifles had 200 rounds of ammo and each of the sappers was given 20 explosive charge and a quantity of dog poison. The commanding officer of the 12th Battalion personally supervised these four groups. The sapper company commander led the advance party. Battalion K1 detailed one of its platoons to join the assault and the platoon was led by the battalion commander. At H-hour, these groups quietly crossed the river from



View of Boulevard Tran Hung Dao following the bitter fighting in Hue.



Quite a few Hue residents can be seen mourning their beloved ones following the month-long fight in Hue.

the Trieu Son Tay hamlet on makeshift nylon rafts consisting of a 1.6 meter square of plastic. Each group had two or three larger nylon rafts to carry its weapons across the river.

After crossing the river three of these groups sneaked along the Citadel wall to attack the First Infantry Division headquarters in the Mang Ca area while the fourth attacked the An Hoa gate's watchtower. The latter group succeeded in blasting the watchtower, the nearby bunker on top of the Citadel, and stormed the gate. The other groups immediately followed the fourth group and consolidated for the attack on the 1st Infantry Division Command compound in Mang Ca, but were pinned down there by the compound defenders. The following morning when friendly APC-backed relief forces came, the enemy withdrew into adjoining houses and divided themselves into two wings - one fighting the relief force and the other defending their retreat route through the west gate.

From the west side of the Citadel they launched an assault on the Tay Loc airfield, the Imperial Palace and the Citadel itself, with three battalions, including a sapper battalion (minus one company) and two infantry battalions (short one company). They conducted the assault from many directions with company sized or larger units which :

Attacked the An Hoa bridge and the Chanh Tay gate.
Infiltrated the Citadel through the drainage duct system.
Attacked the Tay Loc airfield from the west side of the church.
Reached Cuong De Street through drainage ducts.
Occupied the western wall of the Citadel.
Moved on the Imperial Palace.
Attacked up Yet Kieu Street to seize the tall flagpole.
Occupied the southwestern area of the Citadel and the Dong Ba market place (this group detailed one platoon to seize the Chieu Hoi building, the Court of Appeals building and the Information service building.
Attacked the Regional Force company guarding the Bach Ho bridge.
Seized civilian sampans and junks to move to the Bai Dau area to block government relief forces.
Attacked with a battalion sized force to seize An Hoa village.

The regimental commander of the 6th enemy Regt led the main effort himself. As stated previously, all the above mentioned objectives, except for the Tay Loc airfield and the ordnance area, easily fell into enemy hands. The enemy relied on the strength of the

Citadel's walls and civilian houses to organize their defense against our counterattack.

The enemy fought friendly counterattack forces mainly by fighting as close to them as possible in order to avoid or discourage friendly artillery and air support. On the first day he fought fiercely and almost continuously; that night he harassed friendly forces and never let them rest. Next day, he again fought fiercely and continuously. His tactics consisted of fighting in skirmish formations, by concentrating his groups for attacks, by coordinating ground assaults with artillery, by sniper fire, by small-group delaying actions against friendly advancing troops, by attacking the rear or the flanks of friendly formations. At night he sent out small groups to conduct harrassing attacks with B40 and B41 RPG fire on our positions.

The enemy took extensive casualties from friendly heavy artillery and air support.

An estimated 7,500 enemy troops participated directly in the Hue battle. They consisted of at least three regiments of 2,000 men each plus the sappers based in and around the city.

According to Viet Cong documents the Viet Cong suffered 1,042 killed and a larger number of wounded. Those killed included a regimental commander, eight battalion commanders, 24 company commander and 72 platoon leaders. The enemy attack consisted of two phases : the offensive phase from Jan 30 through Feb 6 and the defensive phase from Feb 7 through 25.

While occupying the city the enemy claimed to have persuaded some 600 young people to join his ranks. He seized a treasury safe with four million piastres and liberated 1,800 prisoners from the city jail. He also claimed that he succeeded in forming the People's Alliance for Democracy and Peace with Professor Le Van Hao as chairman, Mrs Tuan Chi, Venerable Thich Don Hau and two unidentified Communists as alliance members.

The enemy forces received orders to withdraw from Hue on Feb 23 but we did not regain control of the entire city until the end of the following day.

D. - LESSONS LEARNED

Enemy documents revealed some of the following shortcomings committed by his units :



The local police station following an intense attack by B.40 and 57mm recoilless rifles.



The Fanxico Church.

- Poor intelligence concerning the situation in An Hoa village, where one battalion was unnecessarily committed to assaulting a friendly airborne battalion which had moved out previously.

- Lack of effective coordination during the Mang Ca assault.

- Several elements got lost and failed to reach the assigned objectives. This caused the assaults to be uncoordinated (The Tay Loc airfield, which should have been attacked before the logistics area was not attacked until later).

- Only makeshift defensive tactics were used rather than offensive actions; of the recorded 416 actions, 254 were defensive in nature.

- Morale and discipline left much to be desired; at first the troops were disciplined but later got out of line, pilfering and looting people's property. For example Thanh, a guerrilla, looted a trunk filled with gold and watches. Luy robbed two umbrellas in the name of liberation.

- The 3rd Company without autorization stole and butchered a pig and one trooper stole 20 sheaves of wool yarn as a gift to some women.

The following factors worked in the enemies favor :

- His use of the people as a shield.

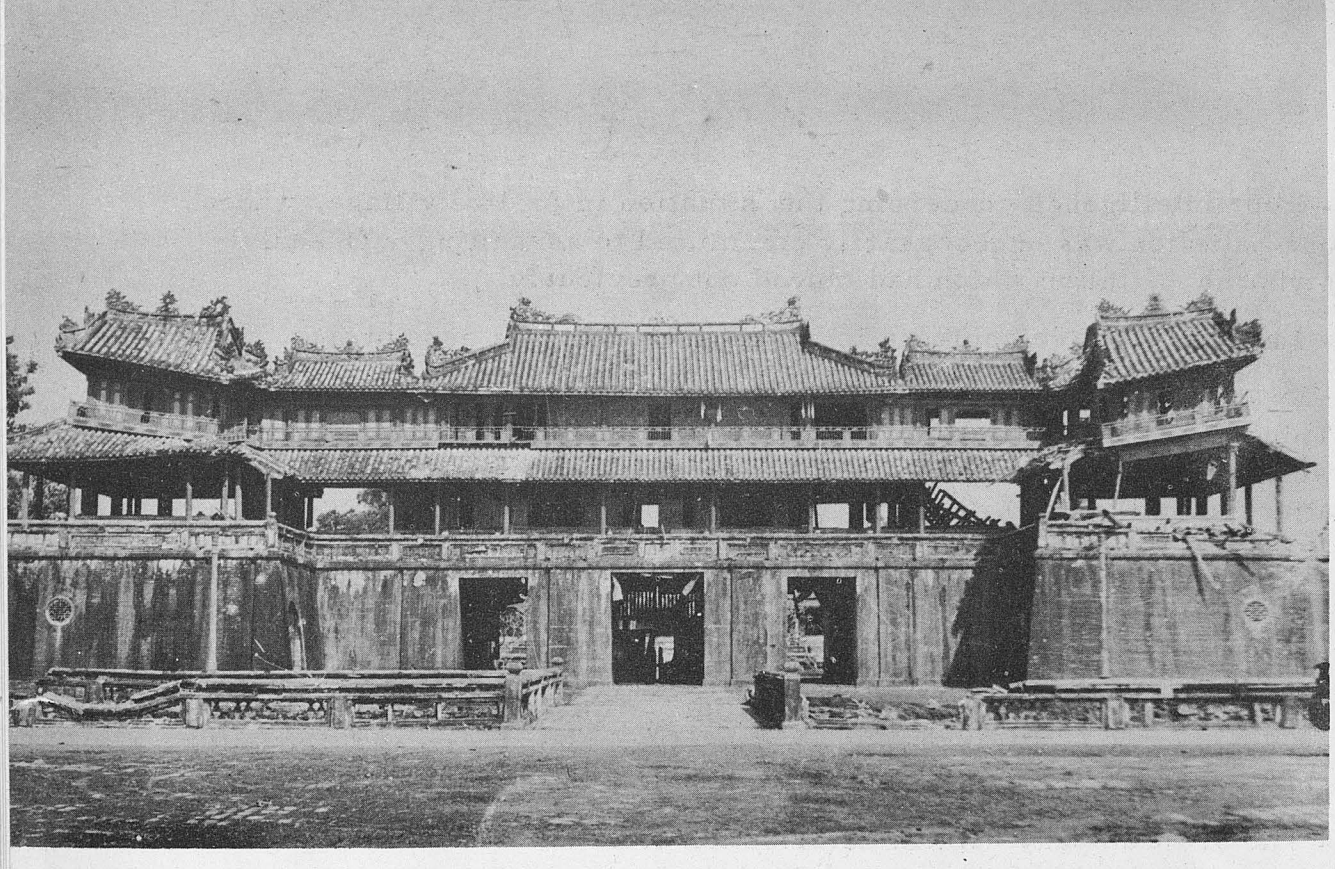
- The protection of the Citadel walls for his defense and from which to launch attacks.

- The support of a number of city people to form the People's Alliance for Democracy and Peace and other subsidiary organizations. Though these organizations brought together only a small fraction of the city's population, their conception and subsequent activities greatly demoralized the people. They were a contributing factor in the vast destruction of the city and because of previous political and personal feuds, the massacre of thousands of people.

The enemy held the Citadel for 26 days due to the cold rainy weather and the poor visibility over the city (at times the cloud ceiling was only 150 meters).

The following major shortcomings and mistakes were committed by the friendly side :

- The invalid assessment of the enemy capability to conduct a ground assault on Hue. Consequently the US 1st Aircav Division, which had



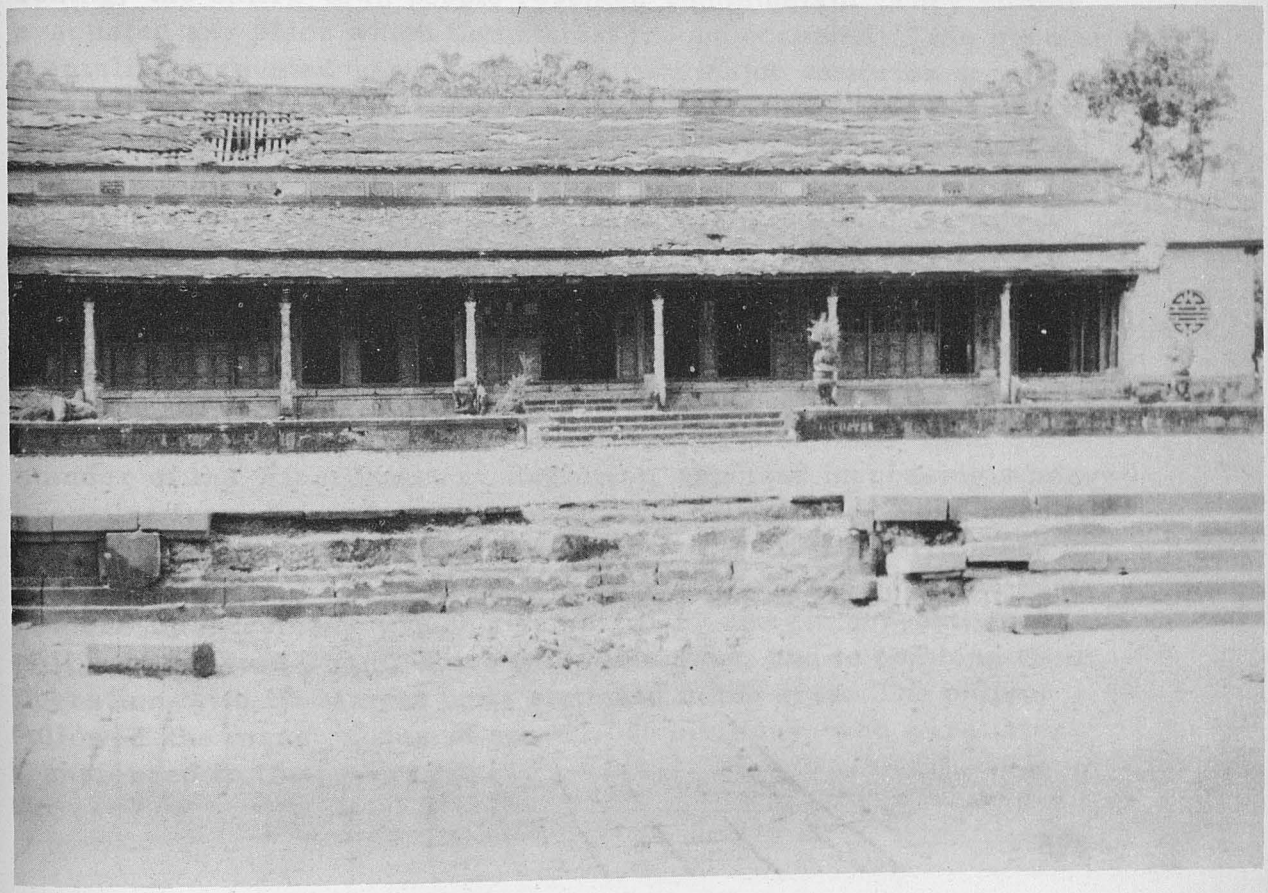
The Ngo Mon Gate following the fighting in Hue



The Ngo Mon Gate viewed from the Thai Hoa Palace



The inner court of the Imperial Palace following the fighting. Of the two litchi trees brought here from China, only one was left standing.



Thai Hoa (Great Peace) Palace

been stationed west of the city, was not notified of the danger of an enemy offensive and was not ordered to make a swift interdiction or intervention.

- When the attack started, friendly troops were not ready for swift action.

- The Hue radio station did not keep the people of Hue properly informed of the true situation. Consequently the enemy had a free hand to make propaganda all day and night during the early stages of the battle, through the use of loudspeakers.

Therefore, we can see that the Hue offensive was the most spectacular enemy action in the war. Its happening defied the imagination of many people.

Local officials, when they heard the enemy-spread rumors about government leaders having been killed, became confused and could not act.

Quang Tri

The Communists' surprise assault on Quang Tri city in early April 1967 served to heighten the Quang Tri city people's vigilance toward further enemy shelling or ground assaults. It encouraged them to contribute positively to the defense of the city. But the enemy military pressures on the town lasted from then till the end of 1967. A frequent reminder of enemy pressures was served by the big battles in the Khe Sanh area and the almost nightly B52 airstrikes, which shook this embattled town. Each and every family in the town had a bunker of its own as each and everyone anticipated that yet another enemy assault on the town might happen anytime anyday. Tension was omnipresent throughout the town. Reports of daily enemy minings and ambushes on the highways to Dong Ha in the north and to Hue in the south brought the widening specter of another enemy ground offensive on the town even closer in everyone's anticipation.

By personal experience rather than by educated reasoning, the entire town people resented Communism. They simply evacuated any place which Communist troops occupied. This popular mentality accounted handsomely for many major victories scored by the 1st Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, which had been bearing the brunt of the Quang Tri war for nearly a decade. Headquartered at La Vang, the regiment was remembered for having inflicted on the enemy the most serious casualties for a single battle in the war a few hours after the 1967 Christmas truce - 221 enemy killed were on the My Thuy beach in Hai Lang district on December 29, 1967.

This is how the Quang Tri offensive developed :

On the 29th day of the 12th lunar month (Jan 28, 1968) the Quang Tri province chief, Lt Col Nguyen Am, a one-time Commander of the First Infantry Regiment, reported increasingly heavy pressure from the enemy in the Khe Sanh valley area. This resulted from the infiltration of 325th NVA Division from the North. The enemy was engaged and fighting raged throughout the day. The Vietnamese infantrymen, though given artillery and air support, had to pull back to Xom Cham, some two miles away, and to combine their operation with US Marine units stationed in the area. The pullout followed the mass exodus of some 1,500 civilians, who were later transferred to Quang Tri city.

By increasing their pressures on Khe Sanh valley, the enemy troops were apparently trying to divert part of the friendly forces from Quang Tri city. Their Khe Sanh campaign started some ten days before Tet.

From Da Nang, I Corps Commander Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam flew to the threatened city and ordered it placed in a state of emergency. All security and armed services as well as civil services were placed on a 100 per cent standby alert. He predicted that the city would have to meet a stiff challenge from the enemy forces. Martial law was proclaimed at the same time.

In the neighboring sub-sectors, all the combat elements were called in to defend their headquarters and to stand ready to rescue the city. In Trieu Phong district, a Rural Development task force was positioned at Bich Khe hamlet to block the enemy's infiltration route to the district town.

Weapons were taken out of warehouses and distributed to civil servants and cadremen. On Jan 28, the curfew, imposed from 2100h. through 0600h. was rigidly observed by the entire people. LTC. Nguyen Am was apparently satisfied with the counter-offensive preparations and confident in the defense arrangements made. He toured several military installations including the newly built Ai Tu airfield, defended by a combined American Air Force and Engineer unit.

By and large, the Quang Tri city people led an austere life. The city's only cinema was also its main public meeting place. It only showed old, obsolescent cheap films. Only a few shops with modest shelves served the entire community. Local people as well as occasional visitors regarded Quang Tri city as divorced from the central government of Saigon.

On the Tet Day's afternoon the weeklong Tet truce was cancelled all over the First Corps area. The Quang Tri people could see even more clearly the signs of a major enemy ground offensive on their city. Enemy elements began to appear in the Hai Lang, Trieu Phong, Tri Buu and La Vang areas, sending thousands of local people panicking toward the city. A few families living near the city's military installations and main thoroughfares moved to other areas inside the city.

For defense and counterattack the friendly forces were positioned as follows :

- The 1st Infantry Regiment, led by Lt Col Nguyen Huu Hanh, was

spread from Long Hung to the M Zone, through La Vang and Thach Han.

- The 9th Airborne Battalion, freshly airlifted from Saigon as a reserved force to help Quang Tri people enjoy a happy Tet, guarded the Hanh Hoa Thon and Tri Buu areas.

- Positioned closest to town was a combined special group of combat (riot) police and RD cadremen.

At 0400h.on the second day of Tet or Jan 31, the enemy unleashed a heavy shelling barrage and a combined ground assault upon the city. The 8th NVA Regiment, infiltrated from north Vietnam only eight days earlier, participated in the battle.

Major enemy assaults were launched on the Tri Buu area, about 1 km from the city, where enemy troops disguised themselves as ARVN paratroopers to swoop on an airborne platoon. But their plot was expeditiously uncovered by our paratroopers. The imposters had worn rubber tire sandals rather than the genuine jungle boots.

In its assault on the De Tu area, which adjoined the city jail, the enemy force overran an airborne platoon stationed in Hanh Hoa Thon and got into the Tri Buu area. But it never succeeded in reaching the jail, which had been overrun in the April 1967 assault on Quang Tri city. But in Hanh Hoa Thon, the airborne platoon suffered serious casualties, trying to throw back the overwhelming enemy force.

At the same time, the other enemy groups indiscriminately assaulted the city from various sides. Two enemy sapper platoons managed to fight their way into the city.

Combat police and Regional Forces troops on machine-gun-mounted trucks threw back all of the enemy assault waves against military and administrative structures.

As daylight dawned on the city, the enemy withdrew, leaving behind his dead. In the De Tu area near the jail hundreds of enemy bodies were left behind to be seen by the crowds of civilians.

The civilian casualties were very light, probably because all civilian houses had their own shelters and bunkers.

The enemy fired many 122mm rockets into the city but these inaccurate missiles missed their targets and caused no damage or casualties.

On the same second day of Tet, Jan 31, gunfire was heard from Tri Buu from dawn to dusk. From this predominently Catholic village the enemy trained his machineguns on the city and fired almost continuously at the MACV compound, the helicopter landing pad, the Information Service and the RD office. He had overrun this village with two companies of the assault force.

In the afternoon, the local Vietnamese and American forces cancelled a planned counter-attack to recapture the village because too many civilians were still trapped there and could not readily leave. This was ascertained by the aerial reconnaissance from US planes of Ai Tu hamlet. These planes had met heavy enemy ground fire from machineguns positioned on top of the village's church.

Throughout the night of Jan 31 fighting broke out almost everywhere in the city. The weather was so bad that no flare support could be provided for the city's defenders. Only a few mortar-propelled flares were fired. Nevertheless the enemy still failed to penetrate any military installation.

On the following morning, Feb 1st, the enemy herded a number of women and children into a protest march toward the city, but the reluctant crowds were dispersed easily. The ground operation conducted by friendly troops with air support against the enemy force in Tri Buu village lasted throughout most of the day and ended in the enemy withdrawing from Tri Buu. The war thus looked to be nearing an end for Quang Tri as the city was returning to normal.

While occupying Tri Buu the enemy rounded up a number of able bodied male villagers, civil servants and soldiers on Tet home leave but allowed women and children to evacuate the village. Then they tied all these male villagers to their gun positions. A good number of these defenseless people were killed and wounded during the friendly airstrikes against enemy positions, along with some 100 enemy counted killed. The village was left in a shambles because of the battle. 80 per cent of the village's homes were damaged or destroyed, while its church was almost a complete loss.

On the night of Tet Day, Jan 30, the enemy shelled the 1st Infantry Regiment's headquarters compound and inflicted light damage to it. The populated areas of the city were only lightly damaged.

During the following days government troops conducted continuous sweep operations in town which resulted in eight communist captured. Seven of them were captured at the main bus station and were about 20 years old and natives of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An,

north Vietnam. The other was a local communist guerrilla, who surrendered hungry and tired after two days of hiding in an underground draining duct.

The city slowly returned to normal. But on the night of Feb 10, the enemy launched an assault on the Roman Catholic Hamlet of Duong Loc, about 12 kms north of the city. This hamlet had long been a target of communist campaigns of terror and destruction. It was normally defended by a PF platoon which was strengthened that night by many students on Tet home vacation. The enemy committed his K8 Battalion plus two regional guerrilla companies to the attack. His attack began around five minutes past midnight but it was unsuccessful in breaking through the solid defense perimeter, which was heavily defended with directional, fragmentary type claymore mines and manned by determined militiamen and civilian people. The actual gunfight did not occur until 0800h.the following morning and lasted for one hour until most defenders ran out of ammunition and withdrew. A small militia element led by Duong Minh Hoang was wiped out fighting a desperate rear guard battle to help the other militiamen escape unhurt from the storming enemy.

Yet the enemy was unable to occupy the hamlet because of the stubborn guerrilla type resistance of the hamlet residents, the many booby traps and intricate alleyways inside the hamlet and, last but not least, artillery support. He was compelled to pull out of the hamlet soon after dark. Six militiamen were killed, a few others abducted, while the enemy suffered a larger number of casualties. I Corps Commander Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam helped the hamlet people rebuild their defense force to a considerable extent soon after that battle.

An amateur writer, Le Nguyen Phuong, made the following comments on the 1968 Tet counter offensive in Quang Tri : " Tribute should be paid to the spirit of alertness of the Quang Tri province government, which had timely prepared the local people emotionally and physically to cope with the enemy offensive since the enemy pressure began to make itself heavily felt on the frontline areas near the city. Quang Tri was fortunate enough to be supported by two airfields, Dong Ha and Ai Tu, which could support each other in case either of them was put out of action. Furthermore, the Ai Tu airfield had a USAF engineer unit, which in times of need could become an effective fighting element to help the city. What had squarely been behind the enemy's inability to mass infiltrate the city was the timely and effective airstrikes provided by these two airfields".

As far as the enemy offensive was concerned the enemy failed in his two major objectives : occupying the city and paralyzing these two airfields.

The other major factors behind the enemy defeats were that :

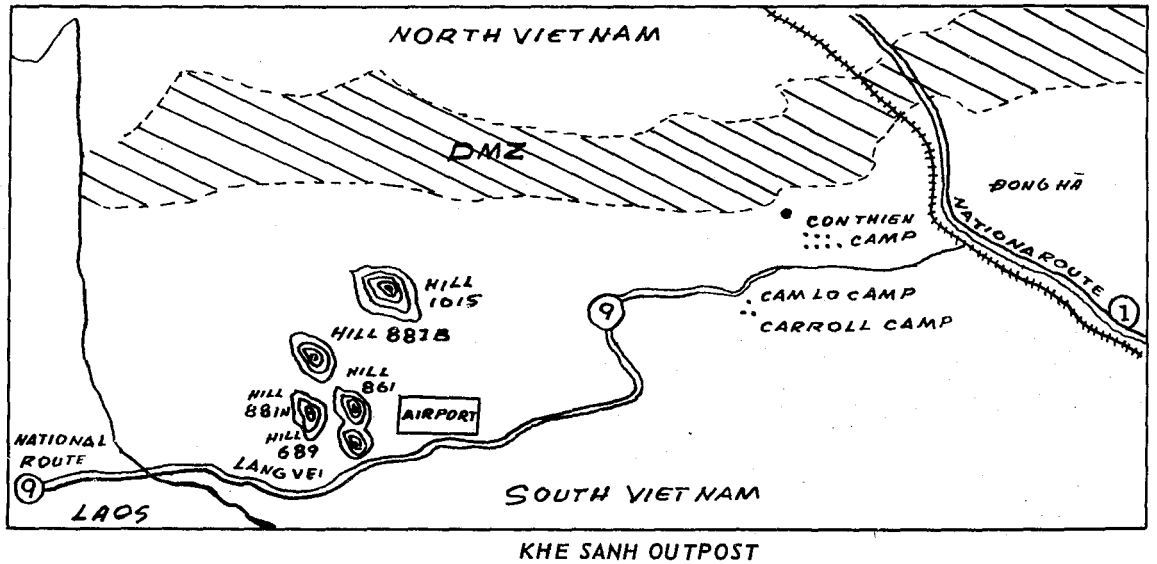
- Battalions 2/1 and 3/1 were conducting a support operations for the local rural development teams in the not distant Trieu Phong and Hai Lang areas ;

- An airborne battalion had been airlifted to strengthen the city's defense perimeter in the Long Hung and Hanh Hoa hamlets;

- 1/1 Battalion supported by an APC squadron, was being stationed on the western side of the city; and

- The people's passive defense program was carried out with precision and effectiveness.

Were it not for these preparations Quang Tri as a frontline city, might not have been able to defend itself during this general offensive. The local government's and people's moral and physical preparedness and ability largely contributed to the enemy defeat. Assaulting Quang Tri city, the enemy had operated in an entirely hostile area and was certainly bound to be defeated. If this was a strategic mistake of the enemy, it should be a permanent reminder for the rest of the country.



KHE SANH OUTPOST

Da Nang

A usually common impression of the first time visitors about Da Nang city was that this was a place where people heard and talked pretty much about the war, but did not have to suffer too much from it.

Two major enemy assaults on Da Nang during the 1968 Tet offensive took place just outside Da Nang, not in Da Nang proper. The city was divided into three precincts or districts - Precinct I, Precinct II and Precinct III. Its defense perimeter arched from the foot of the Hai Van pass, past the city's two airbases, down to Nam O and Hoa Cuong villages. Only people residing along this arching perimeter bore the brunt of enemy assaults.

The first assault all started on the evening of Tet's Eve with the shelling of the Tra Kieu refugee camp, the Non Nuoc or Marble Mountain airbase. The enemy followed it up with a ground assault supported by 57mm recoilless cannons on the headquarters compound of the 1st Army Corps Command.

An estimated enemy company crossed the river from Hoa Cuong village and moved up to the compound. About a dozen enemy troops climbed up the compound's wall and entered the compound itself. No sooner had they reached the flagpole than the defenders opened fire cutting their retreating route as well as preventing further enemy infiltrators. The four armored vehicles guarding the place also maneuvered to encircle the trapped enemy while a recon squad engaged him inside the sprawling courtyard. Shortly before daybreak, the enemy managed to pull out with their yet unknown casualties, leaving the defenders caring for their casualties - three killed, seven wounded and two armored vehicles damaged lightly. An AK 47 automatic rifle was the only booty taken from the enemy.

The battle went by unnoticed by most of the city people, ass the sounds of gunfire were drowned out by those of Tet firecrackers in every neighborhood.

As dawn broke over the city, a relief force was pulled together to conduct a sweep of the adjoining areas. It included the 21st Ranger Battalion the 3/51 Battalion and the 59th RF Battalion with four machineguns mounted light trucks. The sweep resulted in

five enemy killed, and six friendly troops killed, eight wounded. It ended before sundown and the city again virtually returned to normal.

On the morning of Tet Day or a few hours before the enemy broke contact, a number of civilians gathered at the provincial Buddhist pagoda and attempted to hold an anti-government march. Police rushed in and dispersed the crowd. Da Nang was immediately placed under a round-the-clock curfew and its garrison was placed on a 100 per cent stand by alert.

The enemy defeat was generally blamed on the assailants' premature action - one day before schedule and while their main assault force was in the Thanh Khe and Dai Khe areas. It was also blamed for the ensuing defeat of the enemy in his second attempted assault on this sea and air base city.

The second attempted assault happened on the night of Tet Day or Jan 30. It started with an enemy attack on the perimeter outpost at the foot of Hai Van Pass. Counterattack and sweeps in the Nam O and Lien Chieu areas resulted in heavy fighting between the 5th Airborne Battalion and a battalion size element of the enemy 4th Regiment. This enemy element had been assigned to spearhead the first assault on Da Nang city but its tardy arrival affected adversely its fellow assault force on the night of Tet's Eve. The Nam O battle resulted in 150 killed and 18 captured by the airborne.

In addition to his attacks, the enemy conducted terror shellings against Da Nang. On the third day of Tet, he slammed ten rounds of 122mm rocket fire into the Da Nang airbase. Two nights later, he slammed another 30 rounds of rocket fire into the airbase. The campaign caused the populace to engage in a shelter building spree which caused the price of sand bags to soar. At stages the bags were harder to find than food. Generally, observers could tell a rich from a poor Da Nang citizen, an average from a humble one, just by having a glance at his family's shelter.

Quang Nam

Hoi An is the capital of Quang Nam province. Enemy firing started here at 0255 hours on January 30 or Tet eve, together with firecracker explosions and ARVN soldiers greeting Tet by firing their weapons.

Enemy utilized two battalions for the attack on this city, one attacked the position of 102nd Engineer Battalion the other attacked Chi Lang camp which is the former Quang Da Special Zone Headquarters. At that time Chi Lang camp was the rear base of the 51st Infantry Regiment and the camp dispensary.

In these attacks civilians were herded by the enemy as a human shield for the assaults. They were intended to be used later in a demonstration to force a change in the local government.

The enemy took half of the Engineer Battalion position before being stopped. The enemy force attacking Chi Lang camp overran the dispensary and was stopped at the position of the 51st Infantry Regiment by two artillery platoons who fired point-blank range at him.

Supported by APC's and a force of Korean troops the Sector Command made a counterattack. At 1000 hours friendly forces expelled the enemy from the Engineer Battalion position. The dispensary came under control of the friendly force at dark the same day.

The fighting in the city was over on the morning of January 31. Enemy mortar attack of military installations such as the artillery position at Dien Ban, Que Son districts and Ai Nghia bridge happened concurrently with his attack on the city. The city was sporadically pounded by mortar and 122mm rockets until the fifth day of Tet of February 4.

In the attack of the city enemy lost nearly 300 soldiers, 86 weapons including 12 crew-served weapons were captured.

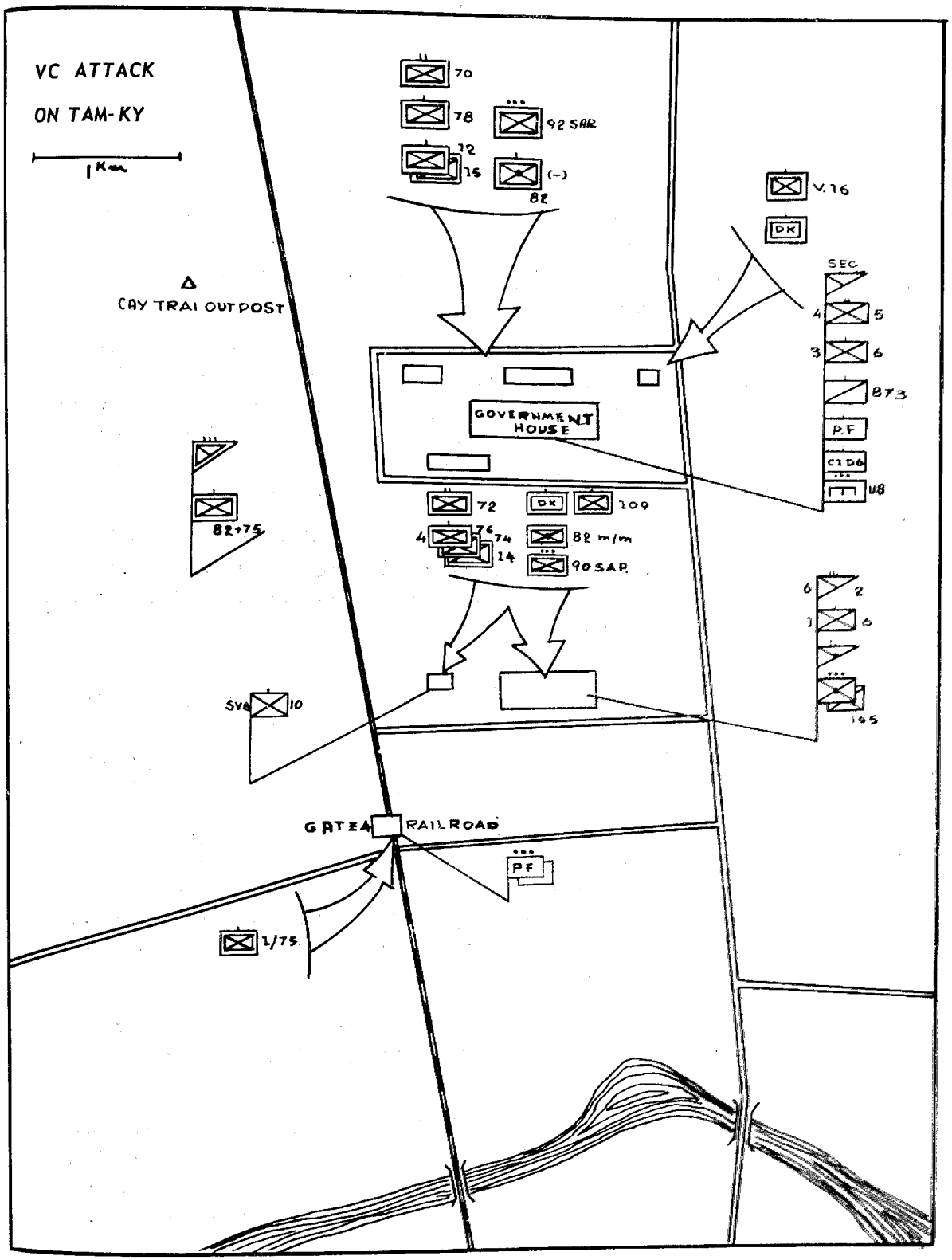
Quang Tin

The enemy unleashed his offensive on Tam Ky city, provincial capital of Quang Tin, around 0400h.on the second day of Tet or Jan 31. He began the attack by firing mortars, recoilless cannons and rockets at all major administrative and military services and headquarters in the city. Then he followed it up with simultaneous ground assaults on the provincial administrative office, the sector command headquarters, the 6th Regiment Command headquarters, the 22nd Artillery Battalion command headquarters and the No 6 railroad level crossing.

Major enemy assaults were on the 6th Regiment command and 22nd Artillery Battalion compounds. After four human wave assaults, the enemy broke through two of the compounds defense lines, but was thrown back by the battalion's cannons firing straight at him. Around daybreak elements of the 6th Regiment launched a two pronged counterattack which send the enemy fleeing in disorder. A group of 38 enemy raised their hands and surrendered to the regimental troops. This was the largest single group of enemy soldiers to have ever surrendered in the 12th Tactical Area. Most of these captives were natives of north Vietnam and NVA soldiers.

The province administrative office and sector command headquarters were attacked from two sides, east and north. On the north side, the enemy was checked and then pinned down by heavy fire power from the defenders. The enemy force which stormed from the eastern side, succeeded in breaking through the outermost defense line, but that was about all. Shortly before daybreak, armed helicopters and armored vehicles came and forced the enemy to withdraw and leave behind hundreds of bodies and 31 wounded who were captured.

Sweep operations against enemy remnants were conducted throughout the second day of Tet. By nightfall, the city was calm again and almost back to normal.


VC ATTACK
ON TAM-KY
1 Km
CAY TRAI OUTPOST
70
78
92 SAR
12
15
(-)
82
V.16
DK
SEC
4
5
3
6
873
P.F
C1 D6
48
GOVERNMENT HOUSE
82+75
72
DK
109
4
76
74
14
82 m/m
90 SAP
6
2
1
5
105
SVN
10
GATE
RAILROAD
P.F
1/75

Kontum

A. - GENERAL

Kontum province has many times been the scene of big battles. Even during the First Indochina War, this particular part of the highland witnessed some of the most vicious war actions that resulted in the fall of Kontum City to Communist control a little before the end of the first Vietnam conflict.

A little before the signing of the Geneva agreements on Vietnam in July 1954, three mobile groups under the command of Colonel Nguyen Khanh (GM 11), Sockell (GM 41) and Jaud (GM 42) were destroyed in this part of the country. A better understanding of the situation would be arrived at if one knows that these mobile groups were elite units with glorious achievements in the past.

A fourth mobile group, GM 100, which came here from Korea also was to be completely destroyed during its retreat from An Khe to Pleiku. Its destruction took place along the Mang Yang pass, which was to remain famous ever since.

Following the withdrawal of the French Army from Indochina, this very important region came under control of the First Vietnamese Infantry Division. It was thought at the time that at least a division-sized force was needed to keep this part of the country secure and help with its economic development.

Many years later, in 1960, Communist troops again tried to make their presence felt in this area. It was to take the form of a big battle at Dak Rota, that rocked the nation when it took place. At the time, only a battalion was destroyed but the Second Indochina War had barely started and the development was viewed in Saigon as indicating a most terrible trend.

Three years later, another battle took place at the district of Toumorong resulting in heavy damages to Battalion 1/40 and the death of the district chief.

Following the arrival of US troops in Vietnam, the war grew more intense with such battles as those fought at Con Tien, Loc Ninh, Phuoc Qua. Kontum again was to serve as the scene of a most important battle in November 1967. In this encounter which took place

in the district of Dakto, each side threw in an estimated 15 battalions and the battle raged for over three weeks before it died down.

Following this, however, the Communists withdrew to the border areas where they are known to maintain at least eight regiments of troops used to secure their infiltration routes. The presence of so many Communists was viewed as indicating war may erupt in Kontum at any time.

Kontum province is one of the largest administrative divisions of the land but it includes only 104,000 people. Of these, the Government of Vietnam controls some 82,000 including the 30,000 residents of Kontum city and its suburbs who are mostly Catholic. Government control in the neighboring area prior to the Tet offensive can only be estimated at one sixth of the provincial territory.

Friendly defense installations in Kontum province were concentrated around two places : the city of Kontum and Dakto. Although artillery pieces in either center could not reach the other, they facilitate the defense task to a great extend as they could be used as base areas for operations reaching far into Communist-held territory.

Kontum city was defended by three friendly forces, one under the direction of the sector command, another belonging to the 24th Special Zone and the third being American troops. Besides, there was another force of minor special force manpower, called the B12 Detachment.

The sector command had 25 RF companies with 2,670 men plus 2,884 PF militiamen guarding outposts and distant villages. Three PF companies were in charge of guarding government offices.

Besides some specialized units the 24th Special Zone's organic units were the 403rd and 406th Recon Companies and the operational control unit was the 42nd Independent Regiment with two battalions - one standing by at the Special Sector headquarters and the other stationed in Dakto, where the regiment staff operated. The Special Zone's force also included the 221st Artillery Battalion, divided into two elements stationed in Kontum and Dakto, the 202nd Engineer Company and an M41 tank squadron stationed in Kontum.

The American force included the 173rd Airborne Brigade stationed in Dakto, a number of armed helicopters at the Kontum airfield, which was expanded recently, and a number of CIDG

units commanded by American officers and stationed in distant outposts.

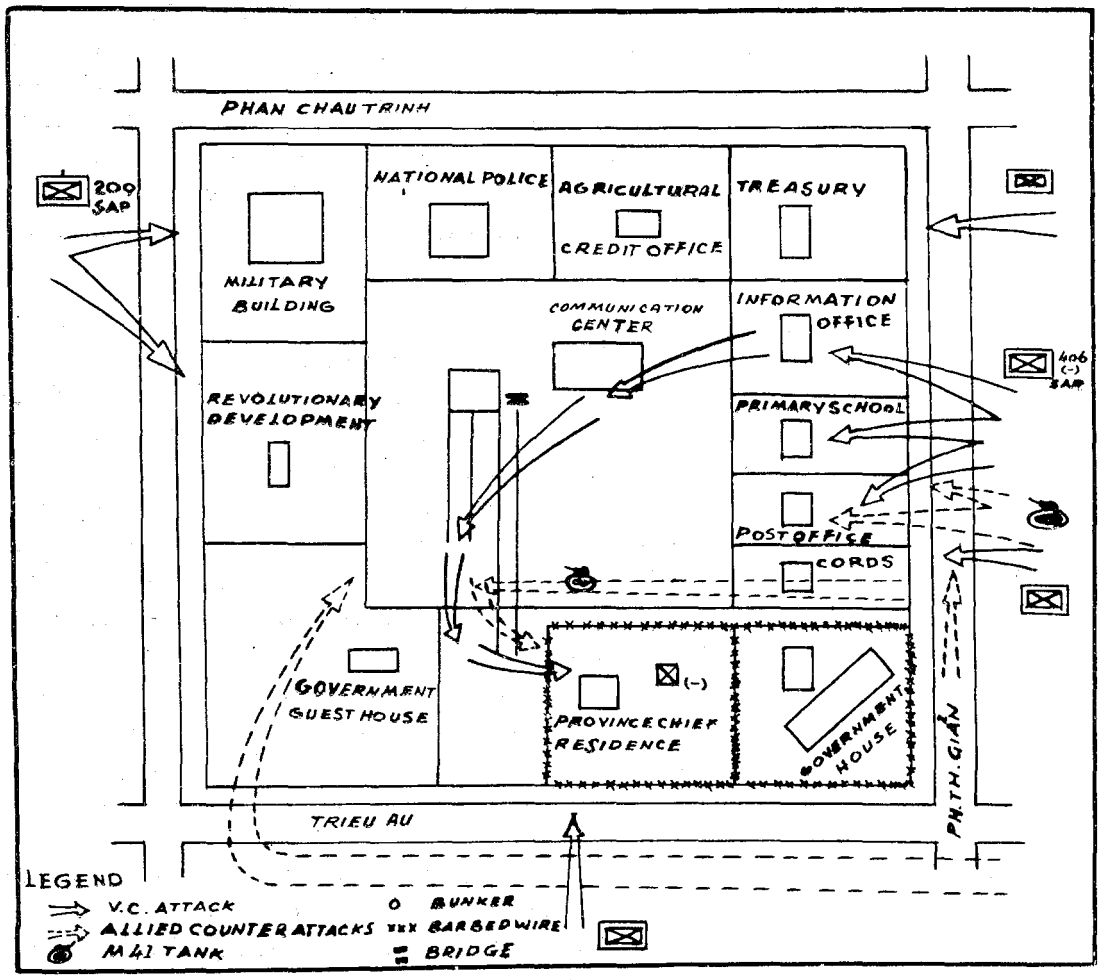
The enemy had been expected to assault the city for some time. But it was not until on the night of Tet's Eve, Jan 30, that he really executed his assault plan. The Kontum city assault took place two days after the enemy attacked Dakto town, where the 42nd Regiment Command was headquartered.

B. - SEQUENCES OF THE ASSAULT

At the stroke of 2 AM Jan 30, the enemy unleashed ferocious shelling barrages on the 24th Special Zone Command headquarters, the Kontum airfield and the city's administrative section. He followed it up some fifteen minutes later with an infantry attack on the latter section. The ground assault was coordinated with the surprise raids by his sapper squads, which had quietly sneaked into this and other areas around midnight as innocent looking Tet holidayers.

The enemy struck very swiftly and effectively any points where there were no government troops or only small groups of defenders. At the position of the 204th Political Warfare Company, he killed all the four soldiers and the commanding officer. He overran it and the neighboring government offices such as the post-office, the information service, the elementary education service and all of the unmanned bunkers. He also spread into the residential and shopping sections of the city easily. But he could not invade military installations and bases, which he chose to surround and isolate from the rest of the city. These points included the Kontum province administrative office, the province chief's residence, the treasury office, the city police station, the logistical administration company, the Army Security compound, the city's military command, the Zone Commander's residence, the Military Police Station etc...

The enemy employed an estimated two battalions to occupy the unguarded or lightly guarded sections of the city, as part of an estimated two regiments committed to the offensive on the whole city and its military sections. These two battalions made up the first column of the enemy force. They were reinforced by a number of local guerrillas and suicide squads and assigned to seize these semi and non-military sections of the city to start a planned popular uprising to bolster the offensive forces and to give the offensive a touch



ENEMY ATTACK ON ADMINISTRATIVE AREA IN KONTUM CITY

of popular revolution.

The second column of the enemy's offensive forces consisted of the 24th VC Regiment, assigned to support the first column and the proposed enemy administration to be set up in Kontum following a successful takeover of the city.

Specifically, the first column bore the brunt of the ground offensive, with the 406th Battalion, which included the C207, C208 and C209 companies, reinforced by commandos and sappers.

The second column played a supporting role, to supply troop replacements, supplies and equipment, and to block Vietnamese and allied reinforcements. It included the K4, K5 and K6 Battalions of the 24th VC Regiment. The K5 Battalion was especially assigned to reinforce the first column's 406th Battalion. The second column itself was reinforced by the X200 Mountain Light Artillery Battalion, which had been assigned to harass the city's key military installations that night, but which failed to do so for unknown reasons.

In his attack on the 24th Special Zone compound, the enemy broke into the nearby officers' housing quarters and, through intelligence data obtained previously, called on each and every officer residing there by his name and rank to come out and surrender. But these officers had escaped moments before he arrived. Only the family of 3rd Lt Vien, who worked for the Zone Intelligence Department, fell victim to enemy atrocity. The lieutenant was at home when enemy guerrillas came. But he ignored the latter's challenge to open the door, causing them to hurl grenades into his home. The blasts killed his little child and wounded his wife, who lost a leg. The lieutenant managed to escape while enemy terrorist were looting canned food and some ducks. Some enemy agents also came to the house of Maj Hoang Khac Minh, Kontum deputy province chief in charge of security, for a similar attempt. But they simply left it as they found out that the house was guarded by some eight militiamen, besides the major himself. They also passed by the city jail, delivering some harassment fire and then left. The jail was defended by one RF platoon. The same held true of the B12 command headquarters. At the airfield, band of 14 enemy got trapped between two American units and was wiped out before it could do any harm to the base or its defenders.

By and large, the enemy's first column failed to achieve its main objectives as the night wore on to an end. But it

apparently wanted to stay and fight, rather than pull out after normal enemy ground attack pattern. The province chief, an army lieutenant colonel, called for reinforcements from the 24th Special Zone Commander, Lt Col Nguyen Trong Luat, whose residence had been defended by a platoon detached from the Battalion 2/4.

The city's defenders started their counter-offensive around 0600h. The first counter-offensive force included the under-strength Battalion 2/4 supported by the Tank Squadron 11/3 with four M41 tanks. Two of these tanks were left behind to guard the Special Zone compound, while the other two were assigned to support two companies on a two-pronged counter-offensive on the enemy positions in the administrative area. One of these two tanks were assigned to pick up Zone Staff Chief Maj Bui Duc Tai who just escaped from his house through an enemy cordon. He left behind his wife and four children at the house, which was kept off the enemy hands by troops guarding the adjoining Zone Security Service office. This tank opened fire on enemy positions around this office, picked up Maj Tai safely and moved up to the administrative area to carry out its assignments. But it did not go very far, as one round of B40 rocket grenade set it aflame. Maj Tai jumped out of the tank and ran for his life. The incident took place at the height of Phan Thanh Gian Street, behind the province chief's office and residence.

The other tank supported the counter-offensive troops effectively in the same general area, blasting the enemy out of the bunkers, which he had occupied at the start of his offensive. With its support the first infantry company recaptured the post office, the elementary education service and the radio communications station. The company commander, 3rd Lt Huynh Van Theo was wounded. Another 3rd lieutenant took over but was hit later. The second company was then dispatched to reinforce the first one to recapture the entire area. Led by 3rd Lt Ve, the relief company succeeded in retaking it almost completely. Some fifty enemy bodies were counted on the ground, besides some 11 assorted weapons. One enemy was shot in the back and killed by his comrades in arms when he raised up his hands in an attempt to surrender.

Around noon on Tet Day, Jan 30, or about ten hours after the enemy started his ground assault on the city, the city's administrative area was recaptured and under control of government troops. But the enemy still held the Bac Ai (Charity) pagoda and the city market place, and the adjoining civilian residential and business

areas, from which he directed sniper fire at passing troops. Maj Son, deputy city commander while riding on the backseat of an army 3rd lieutenant's Honda motorbike from their homes to the City Command headquarters was killed while passing this area and the lieutenant was wounded.

The enemy attempted repeatedly to enter the predominently Roman Catholic Tan Hung area in a suburban section, but was repelled by armed Catholic militia.

The 3rd Company was assigned to recapture the market place. It was led by Lt Hoang Quang Anh, who was later wounded in action. Master Sergeant Huynh Long Thien, who led a platoon to fight the market-based enemy, was killed on Le Van Duyet Street, a few dozen meters short of the market itself. So was the signals noncom who trailed behind him.

Lt Nguyen Lien Hoan volunteered to lead the assault on the market. He himself carried a 57mm recoilless cannon, which he fired with the help of a trooper. The market caught fire from the cannon's incendiary shells, driving most if not all of the enemy diehards out of the structure straight into the fire wall of a small ambushing army unit. This unit blocked the market's main way out to an adjacent residential area. Four enemy were killed by the cannon blasts, four others by the ambush party. The few survivors backed away and fled to the filling station opposite the rear base of the Battalion 2/4, near the airfield, to be intercepted by an American unit later in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, the Battalion 2/4 split itself into three groups including the battalion command and its third company defending the 221st Artillery base, its first and second companies defending the residence of the Special Zone Commander and adjoining compounds and a platoon sent back to the rear base for its defense.

Around 1830 hours, the enemy took revenge and shelled the city. The Special Zone's ammo dump took a direct hit and was two thirds destroyed. The secondary explosions lasted several hours. The friendly artillery pieces opened counter-battery fire with unknown results.

By 2100 hours, the enemy reentered the city for another ground assault. His K5 Battalion attacked the Special Zone Command compound and its subsidiary installations, while its K6

Battalion and a mortar company assaulted the Interrogation Center and the B12 command headquarters as well as the adjoining American billet. Nowhere did the enemy achieved his objectives since his battalions being badly understrength and his men weary following a hectic day of fighting elsewhere. The accurate counter battery fire by friendly artillery destroyed the enemy's mortar company at the beginning of the assault and helped throw back both enemy assaults.

But fighting continued to rage during the rest of the night. A sweep operation conducted by friendly troops in the same general area turned up 20 enemy bodies and three 82mm mortars. The night fighting at the latter stages involved the enemy's 304th Provincial Mainforce Battalion and 406th Sapper Battalion. Both were understrength. These units resumed the assault.

The enemy directed his big guns at the installations but thanks to well dug fortifications and the presence of many troops who hurriedly returned to their camp, all communist assaults failed. A depot of military gear , however, was set afire.

At night, flares hung over the sky and the government troops were effectively supported by air and artillery.

On the second day of the holiday season, government units again were dispatched to restore order in the city. Since their numbers were limited all they could do was sweep areas immediately bordering on the administrative military sections. They were also to receive some help from US troops coming in from the direction of the Da Bla bridge.

Reinforcements sent to relieve enemy pressure at the installations of the 204th Polwar Company counted 12 communists dead. Following this they tried to liberate the Bac Ai Pagoda where a strong enemy force had entrenched itself. They were not able to dislodge the enemy forces but had to call in artillery while US troops blocked all retreating roads through the cemetery. It took government troops several assaults before they reoccupied the pagoda. About 50% of the pagoda was destroyed during the fight.

During the second day of the holiday season enemy troops still kept to downtown areas but they failed to occupy any of the many administrative and military installations in the city. At 1800 hours all the troops on sweep operations returned to the barracks.

In the evening huge US Chinook helicopters had brought

some ammunition to the 221st Artillery Battalion to prepare the local garrison for any eventuality. There had been some indications that the communist might attempt something big against the headquarters of the Special Zone and the local MACV compound.

Later developments were to prove that the Viet Cong had directed all their strength to this decisive battle. Battalion K. 5 was assigned to attack the headquarters of the 24th Special Zone. Battalion K. 6 was assigned to attack the command post of the B. 12 Special Forces unit and the MACV compound, while Battalions 304th and 406th were assigned to attack the administrative section of the city. Battalion K. 4 was to serve as general reserve.

On the friendly side, besides organic units of the Special Zone, there were two additional fighting units : Battalion 2/42 and the 406th Reconnaissance Company.

Here follows the synopsis of the fighting in Kontum :

2000 Hours : The attack began with an assault on the residence of the local commander and the administrative headquarters which was followed by harassment fire against the 221st Artillery Battalion, Battalion 2/42 and Company 406/TK. Meeting with heavy resistance the enemy withdrew.

2120 Hours : A four-pronged attack against the headquarters of the 24th Special Zone was attempted at the same time as smaller assaults against various units in the city were made. The situation quickly grew serious and the defenders had to radio for reinforcements.

2130 Hours : With artillery pieces and helicopter gunships firing point blank at the assaulting enemy troops the frontal attack on the headquarters soon stopped. However, harassment fire continued against the Fourth Engineer Company and Comapny 406/TK.

2135 Hours : Communist troops appeared at the Highland Language School only to be fired at by artillery pieces set up at the base camp of the 221st Artillery Battalion, the B. 12 Command Post, and the MACV compound. Meanwhile, airplanes tried to cut enemy withdrawal routes. At 2220 hours a short lull set in.

2230 Hours : The fight continued with Viet Cong gunners mortaring the police headquarters and the airport. Allied planes strafed enemy positions near the Bac Ai Pagoda and the provincial treasury buildings.

0050 Hours : Communist troops again assaulted the residence of the local commander and the southern section of the B.12 Command Post but were repelled. In these attacks enemy troops also used B.40 rocket launchers. Following this a lull of sorts prevailed for about one hour.

0220 Hours : A final attempt was made against the base camp of the 221st Artillery Battalion but it failed thanks to the intense counter fire of the garrison.

0340 Hours : Communist gunners pounded the gasoline depot starting an immense fire. Following this, other communist troops assaulted the military section of the city but were soon repelled. By early morning all was quiet in Kontum City.

In this first night of the communist offensive, the Special Zone headquarters and the B.12 Command Post had respectively ten and two soldiers wounded by mortar explosions. As the assailants approached their targets the local garrison, aided by point blank artillery fire, killed a record number of enemy soldiers.

The following morning members of the 221st Artillery Battalion were the first to venture out to collect enemy weapons. They were to find two 75mm recoilless rifles, three 82mm mortar tubes, two 60mm mortar tubes, two anti-aircraft machineguns, one M.79, 17 machineguns and 50 AK.47 and AK.50 automatic rifles. Troops from Battalion 2/42 only collected 17 individual weapons as they were a little late in getting out of camp.

The commander of the 221st Artillery Battalion was so pleased with the war booty that he himself counted the weapons captured on that occasion. Unfortunately, he was wounded in the foot by an accidental explosion. This did not dilute his joy at seeing over 200 enemy soldiers lying dead all around his camp. Those bodies became a threat to public health and had to be burned and buried collectively.

In the morning of the third day of the Year of the Monkey, many people from the suburb of Vo Lam entered the city following an attack on the area held by the communists by Battalion 2/42 (-) and Reconnaissance Company 406.

A little before dark a group of F.105 arrived to relieve enemy pressure on the northeast front of the headquarters while the local garrison continued to sweep the city for remnants of the retreating Viet Cong. In the evening the artillery battalion received some

additional ammunition from a fleet of Chinook helicopters.

At nightfall fighting was renewed throughout the city but the enemy failed to achieve anything except setting afire a fortress of the B.12 command post and a building of the base camp of Battalion 2/42.

In the early morning of the fourth day of year of the Monkey two US companies in conjunction with Battalion 2/42 (-) and a group of armored cars, reoccupied the Highland Language School and the area of Vo Lam. The enemy, however, still made his presence felt throughout the city with harassing fire directed at the administrative headquarters and by sending a few rounds of mortar that exploded near the command post of B.12.

By noon that day a convoy of ammunition escorted by tanks arrived from Kontum. But according to the troops, a sensation of apprehension prevailed all through the mission as it was everyone's guess that the communists may attempt to ambush the moving column. No ambush, however, was recorded.

At nightfall and later in the evening enemy gunners again pounded the city. Dozens of warheads exploded, especially in the headquarters area of the Special Zone, resulting in the death of seven combatants, including two officers, they were 2nd Lt. Huynh Trung Trong from the 21st Dalat Military Academy class, deputy company commander, and 3rd Lt. Pham Hong Duc from the Thu Duc Officers' Training School's 25th class. Lt. Duc had done the fighting for three days only.

On the fifth day of Tet, Feb 3, the sweep operations still continued throughout the city. Tanks opened fire on a number of civilian houses and the city's Buddhist compound, which were suspected of having a number of Communist diehards. But these had fled out of town sometime in the preceding night.

The enemy appeared to be unable to launch any further ground offensive during the following days, but still maintained pressures on the city with harassing shellings. These lasted more than one month and mostly happened at night. All of the enemy shelling attacks were conducted with short range rockets of the 107 and 122mm types, launched from a few jungle sites about ten kilometers away. One key rocket launching site was destroyed by a B.52 blanket bombing strike, which resulted in six enemy killed and a launching

pad burned. The result of the B.52 strike was ascertained by a ground search party scouring the area the following day. From that day on and for several following months, there was no further enemy rocketings against the city.

There was no denying that most of the enemy rocket attacks scored direct hits on the city's major installations. Not a single installation was left untouched. All were damaged more or less, a few destroyed. Soon after the enemy stopped his rocketing campaign, friendly troops started repairing the major installations. During the campaign, soldiers' families evacuated their dependents' camps and moved to live temporarily in civilian residential sections and suburbs. As a matter of fact, the campaign took only a few military or military dependent casualties.

Right in the wake of the enemy's ground offensive on the city, the local garrisons strengthened their defense positions with new fixtures, ranging from barbed wire, mine-studded defense perimeters around camps to new, more solid defense bunkers and trenches. The province administration headquarters was among the most carefully defended structures. On the other hand, the people also built their own defense with new barbed wire gates and fences along lanes and alleys, popular self defense units with newly supplied weapons, checkpoints and last but not least, sandbagged shelters in their homes and gardens.

The people had built their own shelters before the assault, when the Dakto battle reached its height a few weeks before Tet. This precautionary measure paid off handsomely, as proved by the very low rate of civilian casualties suffered during the five-day Kontum offensive and counter-offensive. Only twelve civilians were killed.

Besides the Kontum offensive, the enemy attacked two RF outposts at Trung Nghia and Hill 716, each manned by one RF company which became understrength and also unprepared for effective defense because of the Tet holiday. The two companies suffered a combined total of 31 killed and 34 wounded. The Trung Nghia outpost was recaptured soon after it was overrun, while the Hill 716 outpost destroyed by the enemy during his occupation, did not get back into commission until two months later and then only after much reconstruction work.

Kontum people warmly welcomed the government troops

everywhere they went, even while fighting still raged in other sections of the city. They offered drinks and food to the troops and said encouraging words to them. However, some were just bewildered over the fact that government armor vehicles opened cannon fire on civilian homes while fighting the enemy.

Popular support resulted in, among other things, the discovery and elimination of several city-based enemy cells and agents. Regrettably enough, these included a shapely, pretty girl, Tuong, owner of the city's well patronised Cao Nguyen Restaurant, her younger sister and her brother, a Kontum policeman. The three were arrested, confessing to having spied on government troops and installations for the enemy.

Most of the enemy captives showed signs of repentance. A few, especially wounded captives, did not stop cursing and swearing. One even refused a cigarette offered him by his captors. But moments later, when he finally realized that all the enemy prisoners of war were decently treated, he accepted not only the cigarette he had refused but the whole pack given him.

Because of supply difficulties caused by the fighting in the city and other provinces, prices skyrocketed in Kontum, except for the locally-grown vegetables. A bottle of local beer cost 80 piastres (over three times the Saigon price), an average dish of rice, eighty piastres, too (or about four times the Saigon price).

The enemy offensive on Kontum, however, exerted a good psychological impact among the local young folks. Many of these people volunteered for army service, some of them having been onetime draft dodgers. All of the city's army units reached full strength by the influx of new volunteers. All regular army units were equipped with uptodate fast firing M16 automatic rifles, which helped boost the troops' morale even further. Another major morale booster was the victory gained during the Tet days.

However, the Kontum battle was a costly affair for both sides, though the kill ratio was nearly ten to one in favor of the city defenders. The casualty lists were like this :

Friendly side : 54 killed and 135 wounded. Not one weapon was lost to the enemy. The dead included 17 killed at the sector command compound and 37 at the Special Zone Command compound. Those wounded included 46 at the Sector Command and 89 at the Special

Zone compound. The Battalion 2/42 alone suffered 15 killed and 20 wounded in action. Those friendly troops killed included 2 rural development (RD) cadremen and 6 policemen, who were members of the country's para-military forces.

Enemy side : about 500 killed, 38 captured, one surrendered and 151 assorted weapons seized. Airstrikes accounted for a larger part of the enemy killed mostly on his retreating routes. The enemy casualties may run higher, as those listed here did not include those inflicted by American units stationed in the city.

C.- THE DAKTO BATTLE

The enemy began his offensive on this district town called Dakto or Tan Canh about 50 kms northnorthwest of Kontum city, out of small-group infiltrations into town early on the morning of Jan 28 or two days before Tet Day. Among others, one enemy platoon was completely wiped out soon after infiltration. All of its weapons were seized. It was ambushed by an eight-man army unit with M79 grenade launchers.

Actually, this district town has two almost distinct sections : one called Tan Canh, mostly inhabited by military dependents and a small number of tradespeople, with about 2,000 civilian people; the other is the Dakto administrative and military base some three kms up north. Inside Tan Canh town, the 42nd Regiment set up its field command, and this area was called Tan Canh sensitive area. Tan Canh town lies at the foot of a hill, on top of which was the sensitive area compound, guarded by only one army squad of about 12 men. Dakto town had, among other things, a police station handling civilian security affairs.

The enemy had attempted to raid both these army and police bases on the same morning of Jan 28, with a company of his Battalion 2/174. He was detected accidentally by a few government troops. Alerting,the duty officer, Lt Nien, sent out six men led by Master Sergeant Ngo to confirm the fact. The group moved downhill in a jeep to the market place, where enemy troops were last spotted. He stationed his men on both sides of the market and called for two more men with M79 grenade launchers. The jeep was used to run up and down the hill, where the command headquarters of the 42nd Regiment was stationed, to bring in more grenades and also to mislead enemy intelligence. The plan worked beautifully, as the enemy withdrew soon after Sgt Ngo's small ambush party opened fire from both

sides of the market. The sergeant and another man of his fired some 300 rounds of M79 grenades at the surprised enemy in the clash. Two light machineguns of the ambush party also did a fine job. The enemy fled, leaving behind his dead and 15 weapons, including one mortar and one heavy machinegun.

Major Dinh The Thoai, who commands the 42nd Regiment, ordered the collection of Viet Cong bodies and weapons to be shown to the public at the local stadium.

But a second battle was to take place in Tan Canh in the first hours of the Year of the Monkey. As in Kontum city, the people in Tan Canh had just celebrated the passing of the old year and the advent of the new year when gunfire could be heard.

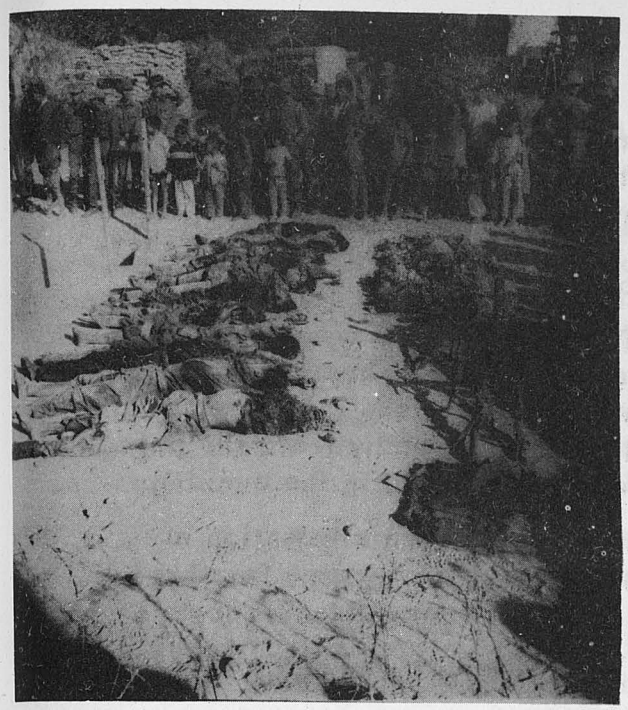
As on the previous occasion the enemy's presence was betrayed before he actually attacked GVN installations. The alert was given when a government soldier escaped from the Viet Cong and informed the autorities of the advancing coming units. He had been part of a five man antenna dispatched to watch enemy movements from a pagoda just outside the small town.

In the cold night of the highlands, all the five men soon entered the pagoda for their night's rest. A group of communist soldiers who had been secretly following their movement and immediately entered the pagoda and killed them with knives. Of the five men, only one escaped. He immediately reported the incident to headquarters.

The sergeant who had been on duty that night at once reported to his superiors, then he took a squad of troops to block the infiltration route the enemy had used on a previous occasion. He was killed in the ensuing battle, another hero simply known to his comrades-in-arms as Sergeant Nganh, but the enemy was stopped.

Immediately after reception of the report of an impending communist attack friendly artillery pieces had pounded at all suspected enemy troop concentrations. By five o'clock in the morning a company size reaction force entered the town.

The commander of the 42nd Regiment was personally commanding this small force while his deputy took upon himself the task of bringing to the barracks some of those on leave on that sacred day.





Major Dinh The Thoai, Commander of the 42nd Regiment, talking with a VC returnee.



Pictures of the fighting in Dakto

The local US garrison also dispatched a group of tanks to support the advancing troops but the first armored vehicle to arrive at the market place was hit by a B.40 grenade that broke parts of its tread. It took the government soldiers all morning before they were able to dislodge the enemy from the downtown section.

The situation at the Tan Canh pagoda was a little more difficult as enemy troops,taking advantage of the higher ground there, repulsed all attempts by government soldiers to take the position. It took Major Thoai the whole day to dislodge the enemy from the pagoda. The pagoda finally came under government control in the evening.

In this battle the enemy had deployed a battalion of troops but only about two companies had arrived in time for this encounter that cost the communists over 100 dead. Friendly losses were 14 killed and over 30 wounded.

D.- REMARKS

Following the victory, Major Bui Duc Tai, the chief of staff of the 24th Special Zone made the following comment on the battle of Tan Canh.

" If the enemy had had two regiments of troops and had deployed them against the administrative section and the headquarters of the Special Zone, the outcome of the battle could have been different.

" But the communist commander was too subjective in his assessment of the situation. His troops, fighting in that night of joy, were only given the task of attacking the administrative section, while the Special Zone's headquarters where one battalion of infantrymen and a group of tanks were garrisoning was not touched.

" Not having to defend themselves these units immediately fanned out for a counterattack. Therefore when the enemy decided 24 hours later to throw in more troops the defense of the headquarters had been organized. Thus his future attacks repeatedly failed.

" In the following days all military activities of the communists in this area were the simple deeds of a blind man unable to see around."

The enemy succeeded easily in infiltrating the city but failed in taking over even poorly guarded military installations. What had been behind this failure ? Perhaps, the enemy force had

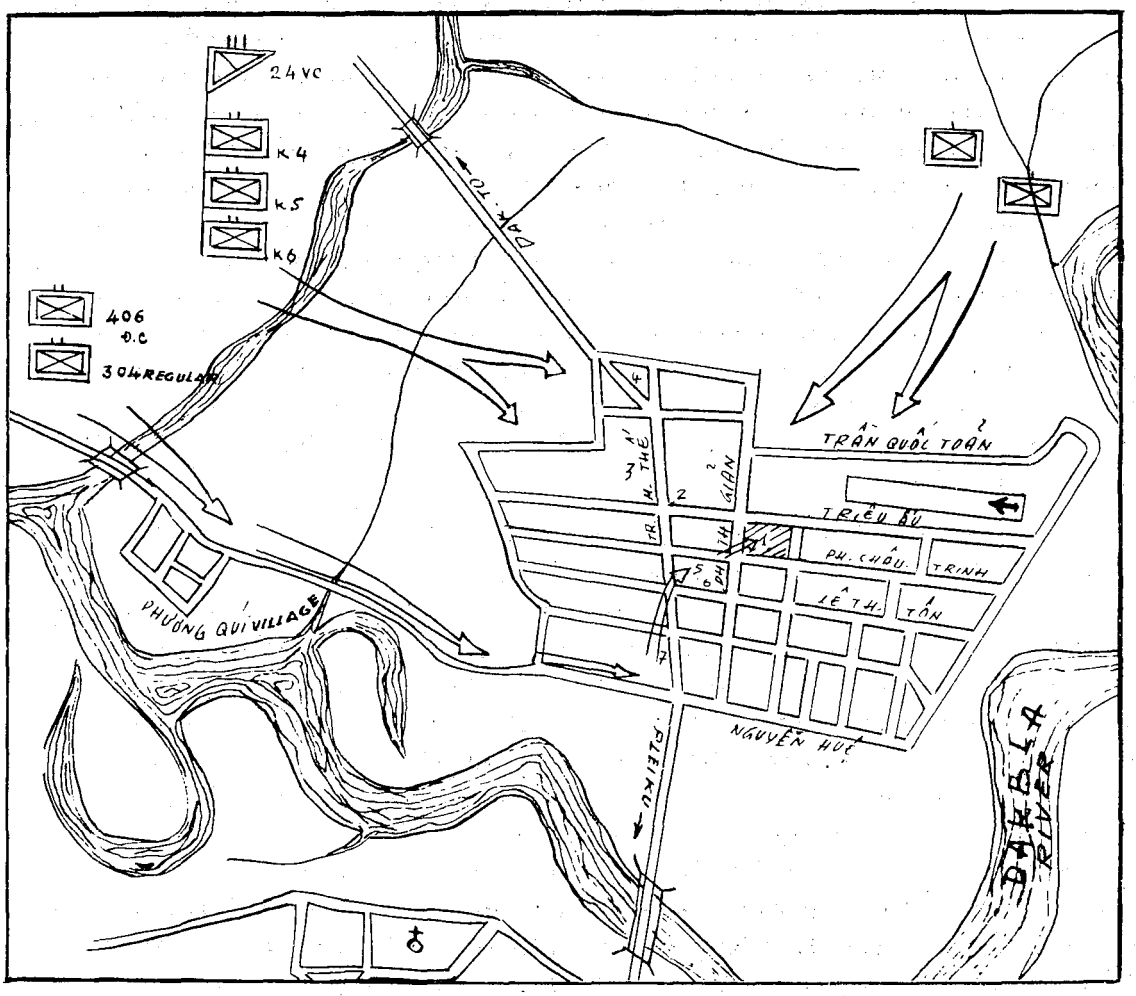
spread itself too thin to take over all the scheduled objectives at the same time.

Another tactical mistake committed by enemy commanders was that the enemy failed to bank on the factor of surprise and concentrate larger manpower to take over the key installations during the first few hours of his offensive. Instead, he committed only small units to the attack, among others, the Special Zone Command and MACV compounds, located in the middle of a vast plot of flat, barren land. During these attacks he took heavy casualties from airstrikes and artillery fragmentary shells exploding in mid-air.

As far as the friendly forces were concerned, they were only garrison troops with short-term defense capabilities and almost devoid of counter-offensive potentials. They were sorely overworked since they were thrown into the counter-offensive right on the following morning of Tet Day and throughout the day, and then called back for garrison defense duties at night. These troops had been placed under almost constant alert, for months on end prior to the enemy's offensive. They were understandably incapable of fighting the enemy on both the defensive and offensive right at the doorstep of their camps and barracks. Had the weather been bad enough to hamper airborne supplies and reinforcements, these garrisons may have been isolated, starved and wiped out by the outnumbering, determined enemy assault force. The defense of Kontum mostly depended upon the powerful US forces stationed there.

(The first division stationed in Kontum was the 12th division which was later renamed the 22nd Infantry Division. This division is composed of three regiments the 40th, 41st and 42nd which were positioned respectively in Kontum, Dakto, and Daksut. From these positions they dispatched battalion units to operate in border areas. When enemy pressure increased government control area became smaller. However, the 22nd Infantry Division had to move to the coastal area and make their headquarters in Qui Nhon city, Binh Dinh province. In 1965 enemy pressure on Binh Dinh province was heavy especially after the battle at An Lao where the garrison almost collapsed. The 40th Regiment was sent from Kontum to reinforce this garrison and later the 41st Regiment and the light command post of the 22nd Infantry Division moved to this area to meet the battle needs. The 40th and 41st Regiments were retained here causing the main CP of the division to move to Qui Nhon city. The 24th Special Zone was formed at this time to cope with the threat in Kontum. Perhaps for

that reason the 22nd Infantry Division did not return to Kontum although Binh Dinh province was satisfactorily secured in 1967 with the allied divisions positioned there namely ; the Korean Tiger Divisions and the US 1st Air Cav. Division.)



V. C. ATTACK IN KONTUM

Banmethuot

A. GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS

Banmethuot is a small town and the capital city of Darlac province. It is located on a vast flat expanse in the Central Vietnam highland. It is surrounded by centuries old jungles with scattered small tribal concentrations which are generally nomadic and live from minor farming and hunting. It has never become an important battle area since the midforties or the beginning of the Indochina War.

The city enjoyed relative calm and never served as an objective for a massive ground offensive from the Communists until the spring of 1968. This was due to the fact that Rhade tribes, who accounted for the majority of the local population, resented Communism and the fact that the province itself had a food deficit, depressed area. Neither element favored Communist guerrillas or regular troops since they had to bring food, supplies and almost everything else all the way from North Vietnam through jungle trails.

The Communists were very much aware of this unfavorable situation. They brought in equipment and food for months before they unleashed the offensive. These supplies were infiltrated from their way stations and supply bases in Cambodian border areas. Their support personnel were recruited or drafted from among the lowlanders all the way from coastal provinces and from those who had settled in government sponsored land development colonies in the province. Local guerrillas were also provided them in this way. The entire enemy assault force, regular and irregular, was estimated at about 3,500 men. It foreboded great danger for the city garrison which had never faced such an overwhelming enemy force before. With such a large manpower commitment the enemy seemed intent on taking over the city and turning it into either a rear base or a political capital for the Communist led National Liberation Front.

After a week fighting the enemy failed to occupy any Vietnamese military installations or compounds. His force spread into the populated areas and engaged in seesaw battles against the city defenders who were supported by armor artillery and air strikes which extensively damaged the property and life of the local civilian population.

The 1/8 Tank Squadron and the 3/8 APC Squadron played the key part in the defense of the city and in defeating the enemy. The use of tank, cannons, however,caused civilian casualties and property damage. Though these casualties and property damage were very regrettable accidents of war they were almost unavoidable.

The organic garrison soldiers of the 23rd Tactical Zone Command headquarters made up the only infantry unit defending the city. There were not many of them however. The enemy outnumbered and outgunned them.

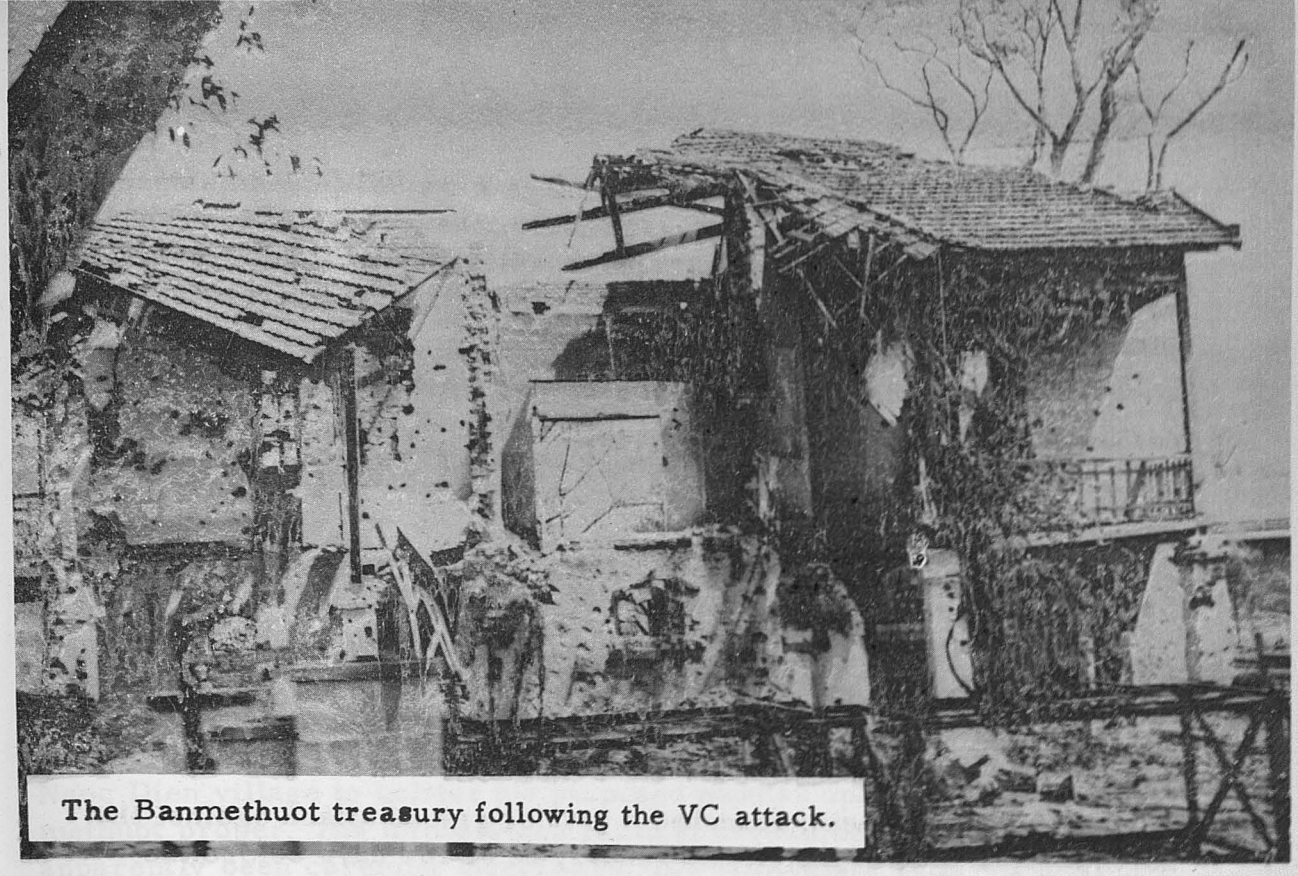
Although the enemy was able to exploit the factor of surprise the failure of their attacks served to demoralize their fighting men. They elected to fight a defensive war from populated areas to include civilian houses and a few public buildings. Apparently they were ordered to stick to their positions and fight as long as possible and at all costs. Therefore their lost was heavier than the lost they suffered in jungle battles.

Commencing with the second day of their offensive the enemy units failed to stage any more assaults on any Vietnamese military compounds. They dug in and fought defensively. Many enemy positions were almost sitting ducks for Vietnamese armor and artillery. This style of fighting cost the enemy the highest combat casualties known in the city area since the beginning of the war.

Friendly forces suffered 148 killed, 315 wounded and 22 missing. The 23rd Infantry Division alone suffered 112 killed, 268 wounded and three missing in action. Equipment losses included 41 weapons, three tanks and two armored carriers burned, four other armor vehicles damaged and a number of radio transceivers and vehicles.

The enemy paid dearly. They had 924 of their men killed and 143 captured, they lost 243 weapons including 46 which were crew served.

The civilian population also suffered severely 176 were killed, 403 wounded and forced to live in eleven temporary refugee centers. Material damage included 3,319 houses destroyed completely and 479 houses at least 50% damaged 18,823 persons were made homeless and military dependents suffered a sizeable portion of the casualties and property damage. There were 66 killed, 48 wounded and 1095 houses destroyed with 323 housing units 50% damaged.



The Banmethuot treasury following the VC attack.



View of a battlefield in Banmethuot.

The following public buildings were left in shambles : the provincial administrative headquarters, the provincial guest house, the treasury service, the market place police station, the information service the public servants housing and the official residences of the three deputy province chiefs.

The headquarters of the 232nd Artillery Battalion was damaged by 50% while the 514th transportation Company headquarters and the 8th Armor Squadron compound were 30% damaged.

B. THE GROUND ASSAULT ON THE CITY

The enemy had started applying heavy military pressures on city outposts such as the Lac Thien and Buon Ho sub-sectors as early as mid-January 1968. The 552 Ammo Dump in Banmethuot was a target of enemy sabotage by explosive charges.

The enemy launched a probing ground attack against the northwestern side of the city on January 28 or two days before the enemy's D-Day. The 23rd Tactical Zone reacted with a reconnaissance in force and made contact with the enemy. Despite this contact friendly forces remained in doubt concerning enemy intentions.

Calm returned to the city the following day. It was a quiet day with the Tet truce proclaimed in Banmethuot as well as throughout the country. The people conducted their traditional Tet shopping spree. Only 30 per cent of the city's garrison were kept on routine guard duties while the remainder were granted Tet home leave to enjoy the year's greatest festival.

Everything seemed normal and quiet until 0135 hours. Jan. 31 or Tet Day when the enemy actually launched his massive ground offensive against the city.

The enemy offensive force estimated at some 3500 men, consisted of the 33rd Regiment with four organic battalions, the 401st and the 301st Province organic Mobile Battalions and the Regional Guerrilla Companies H4, H5, H6 and H8.

The enemy attacked from three staging points, located in northwestern and southeastern fringes of the city.

The first enemy attacking echelon, which was the 33rd Regiment, struck from the Ea Enao brook staging area in the

southeastern side of the city. This area encompassed the compounds of the 22nd Infantry Battalion, the Sector Command, the 514th Transportation Company headquarters and a few minor military installations.

The second enemy attack column included the 301st and 401st Battalions hit the city's military section defended by the 231st and 232nd Artillery Battalions and the 8th Armor Squadron.

The third enemy grouping was spearheaded by the four regional guerrilla companies H4, H5, H6 and H8 which assaulted the city's populated areas.

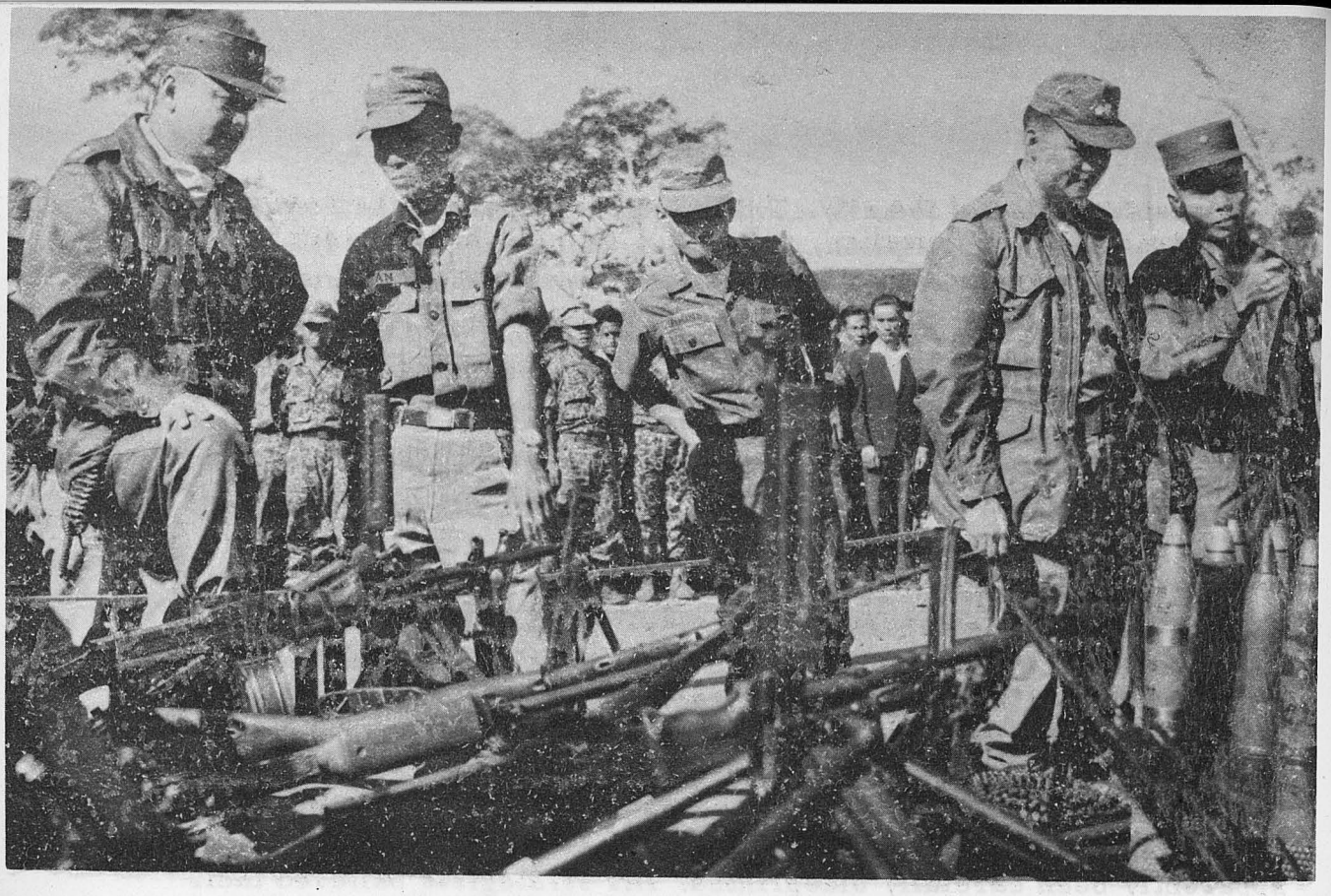
The enemy apparently believed he could seize the entire city quickly with his superior manpower. He had planned to drive the civilians of Banmethuot into a spectacular pro-Communist mass rally to welcome his "liberation" soldiers and goad them into a popular uprising to seize power in this province. He had also planned to conduct popular marches into the city from distant areas such as Khue Ngoc Dien village to bolster his proposed popular upheaval in Banmethuot proper. His military and political assault on Banmethuot had apparently been carefully blueprinted. His strategists believed their assault would be a complete success.

This apparent state of mind among enemy commanders and troops explain the fierceness and ferocity of his assault during its first day.

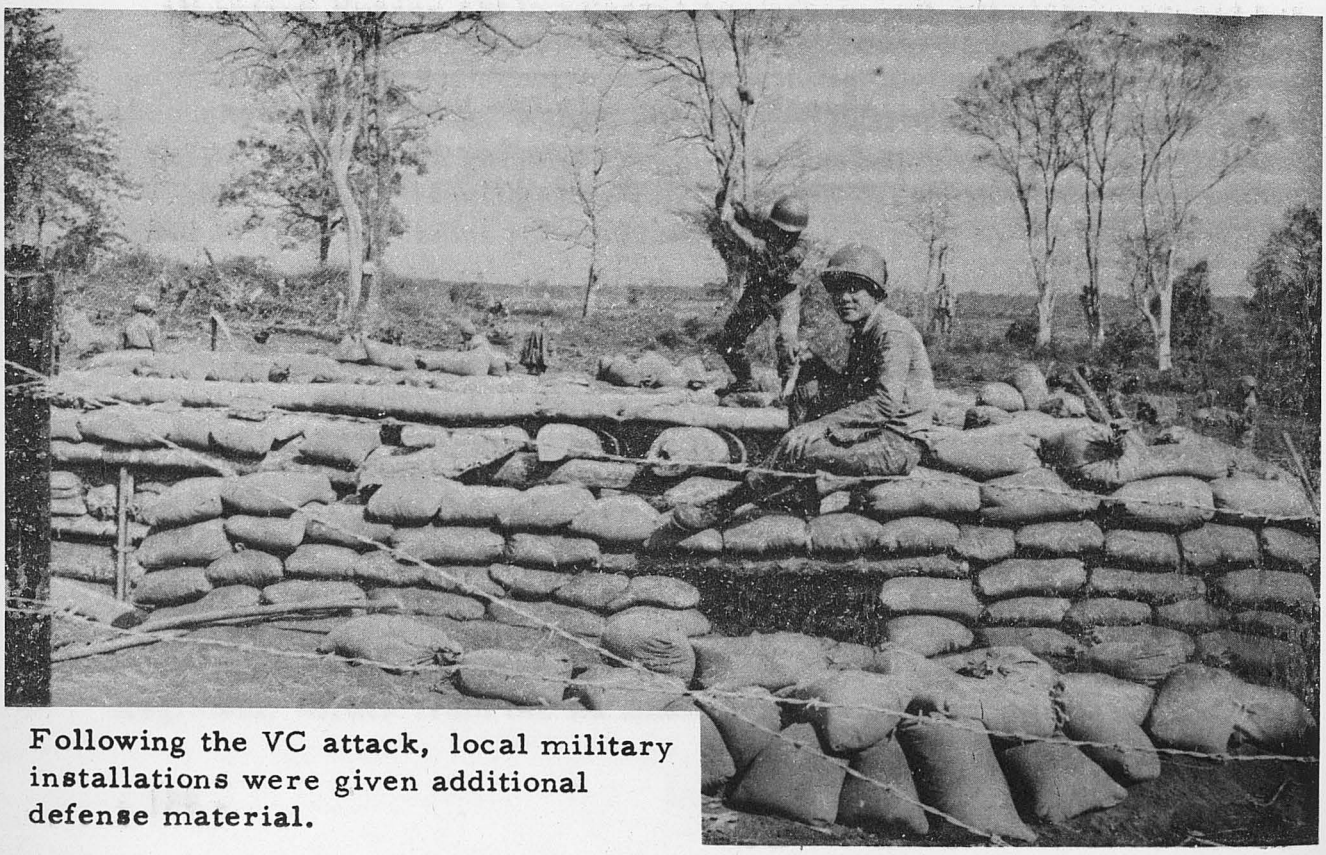
Things did not work the way they had planned.

The city appeared calm on the evening of Tet's Eve. The people had gone to bed after celebrating the traditional ritual to send off the dying Year of the Goat and to welcome the incoming Year of the Monkey. Banmethuot citizens were sleeping soundly or hoping religiously that things and events would not go against them in the new year.

This dream turned into a nightmare for many of the new year celebrants indeed. The enemy opened fire with heavy mortar barrages on the air base, the Division Command headquarters, the province administration office and adjoining public compounds. These were followed by massive infantry assaults on the city. Hardly any military installations or sensitive points were spared. Even military dependents' camps came under enemy ground attack. Gunfire broke out almost everywhere. The enemy was seen roaming from street to street in the civilian residential and business sections of the city.



LTG Vinh Loc, II Corps Commander
visiting the frontline



Following the VC attack, local military installations were given additional defense material.

At all military camps the enemy was checked by fierce, stubborn counter fire from the defenders. At the sector command compound 18 enemy bodies and six weapons were left behind. The enemy failed to storm the radio station which he later chose to surround. All of the enemy assaults were thrown back by soldiers of the 514th Transportation Company. The Artillerymen also stood their ground at times firing their howitzers almost level and at point blank range.

The enemy, however, succeeded in breaking into the province administrative headquarters, the treasury office, the 3rd financial administration office and the market place police station. Four policemen were killed and five wounded.

The Commander of the 23rd Infantry Division immediately launched a counter-offensive. The counterattacking forces consisted of the 8th Armor Squadron, the 45th Infantry Regiment with the Second and the Third Battalions and the 45th Recon Company, the latter was operating on the city's outskirts. The 413th,409th,and 23rd Reconnaissance Companies, the 702nd RF Company, and the 23rd Ranger Company were brought in from the country to aid in the rescue of the embattled city.

The counter-offensive started around 0200 hours, about half an hour after the enemy unleashed his infantry assaults. The 8th Armor Squadron spearheaded the action.

One of the 8th Armor M41 tanks took a direct rocket hit and was stopped. The tank caught fire in the entrance to its base camp. This did not discourage the other tanks which stormed their way out firing all of their guns at enemy positions. They were under orders to relieve enemy pressures from all embattled or besieged military and administrative compounds, to guard all strategic points, and to prevent the enemy from spreading to other areas.

When the armor column reached the treasury office an armored personnel carrier (APC) took a direct hit from an enemy B40 rocket and began burning. This loss did not deter the column from moving further and carrying out its assignments. Moments later two more armored vehicles, one tank and one APC, took other direct hits and burst into flames.

The 8th Armor Squadron achieved all of its objectives around daybreak, though it had lost four of its vehicles. This was

regarded as a special feat since it was achieved by maneuvering in the dark and in the midst of numerically superior enemy equipped with the deadly B40 and B41 rocket launchers and other anti-tank weapons. The armored column's action served to boost the morale of the defenders who were emotionally and physically unprepared for such a massive assault by the enemy. At the same time it threw the whole enemy assault plan into disorder, if not disrupting it, to a point where he was pinned down at his initial position.

On the morning of Tet Day, Jan 30, the 45th Reconnaissance Company was twice engaged by the enemy, some 14 kms from the city, as they were on the way to rescue the embattled city. Having killed some 20 enemy and captured a few assorted weapons, including one mortar, the company could not reach the city until mid-afternoon.

In the meantime the government troops stormed out of their defensive positions, camps and compounds to initiate a counter-offensive and a city-wide sweep operation which would continue into the night.

Two platoons of the 23rd Reconnaissance Company which swept the Officers' housing quarter, captured three enemy. The 413th striking Reconnaissance Company, however, failed to dislodge the numerically superior enemy from the treasury office building. One armor detachment was sent to relieve enemy pressure at the station and lost one tank to anti tank fire. Though out gunned the enemy still held out. Enemy pressure on the PF training camp, about 1 km from the radio station, were still heavy. Three PF men were killed and two wounded in one of his assaults on the camp.

The 45th Regiment was also called in from the fields that day. It was ordered to strike enemy positions from the rear. Its 2nd Battalion engaged the enemy about one km from downtown, killing 25 and capturing ten. Also captured were four weapons, including one mortar and one machinegun. The Regiment's 3rd Battalion, also striking from the rear, killed 70 enemy and captured 39 as well as taking 44 weapons including an antiaircraft machinegun. This occurred at Buon Kao hamlet just outside the city.

Enemy pressure inside the city was still very much in evidence until dark. Around 1400 hours agitation propaganda agents succeeded in herding civilians into a small antigovernment demonstration. The crowd was swiftly dispersed by police. Friendly troops, supported by tanks, maneuvered to block and defend all sensitive and

strategic points in the city. They braced themselves for another day of fighting. The enemy apparently tired after a day of heavy fighting, also settled for a status quo during the night and confined his actions to harassing shellings only. The sector command coupound was his favorite target that night. Not one infantry action was recorded from the enemy side.

At sunrise the 2/45 Battalion supported by the 3/8 APC Squadron launched an attack on the enemy held treasury building. This attack was conducted from two sides. On one side were the armored units and on the other the 3/45 Battalion, just called in as reinforcements. The solidly entrenched enemy held out ferociously. Until 1400 hours the best that friendly forces involved could do was to isolate the enemy from the remainder of his forces.

The infantry reinforced APC unit stormed into the nearby coffee tree garden killing eight enemy and seizing two weapons. The 3/45 Battalion on the other flank having returned from Buon-Kao hamlet attacked the Lasan hill killing 32 enemy and seizing nine weapons. This unit suffered 19 killed and 29 wounded in a very difficult uphill fight.

The enemy staged a daring diversionary counterattack on the nearby MACV compound and Imperial Palace as the government forces were trying to close in on the enemy positions inside the coffee tree garden. The APC unit and the 2/45 Battalion had to call off their siege against the treasury house in order to pursue the assailants in this area, which had previously been safe. Their action cost the enemy ten killed, two captured and four weapons.

The 2nd and 3rd Battalion of 45th assaulted the enemy positions inside the provincial administration compound and accounted for another 32 enemy killed, seven captured and 18 weapons seized. The 702nd RF Company was then assigned to guard the compound after it was freed from enemy occupation around 1900 hours.

As these two units pursued the enemy at the MACV compound, the Imperial Palace and the provincial administration headquarters, other government troops moved into the coffee garden to complete the assault against the enemy holed up inside. Included among these troops were the 45th Regiment Headquarter, the 45th Reconnaissance company and the 889th RF Company. By this time the wearied enemy could only provide weak resistance. When the smoke cleared over the courtyard of the building thirty enemy bodies were

counted. There were 12 enemy captured along with four weapons, including one machinegun, The attacking force suffered two killed and four wounded.

A number of enemy diehards continued to hold out as night fell over the treasury building. From this building, they opened automatic weapon fire on the provincial administration compound and forced the 702nd RF Company guarding it to withdraw to the sector command compound.

No infantry action was recorded during the rest of the night. The enemy again confined his actions to only sporadic harassing shellings of night positions and military installations around town. There were no significant results. Major targets included the position of the 514th Transportation company, the province administration headquarters, the 23rd Division Command compound, the airfield for L. 19 spotter planes and the 23rd Reconnaissance Company's dependent housing camp.

Around daybreak on the third day of Tet, Feb. 1st, the 377th and 702nd RF Companies assaulted the treasury office and the provincial administration headquarters. They were surprised to learn that the enemy diehards, who had survived many assault waves of armor supported friendly troops all the previous day, had evacuated the area under cover of night.

The 8th Armor Battalion and the 2/45th Battalion also conducted a sweep operation in the neighboring areas between 0800 hours and 1500 hours securing complete control of all the thoroughfares of this downtown area.

On the same day the 23rd Division Command devoted all of its available garrison troops to the task of sweeping the southwest ern section of the city surrounding the Cho Nho (Small Market) area. The units involved included the 23rd Ranger Battalion and the 23rd Reconnaissance Company. The Major targets were the Protestant Church, the Finance Office No 3, the Lasan hill and the Cho Nho market plus the adjoining areas. The action was marked by sporadic, scattered clashes with minor enemy elements which were apparently left behind to harass and delay. Fifty four enemy were killed, eleven captured and sixteen assorted weapons seized. Friendly forces suffered 12 killed and 19 wounded.

On the third night of Tet, unlike previous nights when the enemy had confined his actions to sporadic harassment shellings, he now launched an assault on the 232nd Artillery Battalion. This battalion had provided effective artillery support for friendly counterattacking troops at earlier stages of the Banmethuot battle. The enemy was thrown back leaving behind 17 killed, two captured, and five weapons. The 232nd Artillery battalion suffered two killed and five wounded in action.

The 3/45 Battalion, pursuing the retreating enemy force northwest of the artillery battalion's position shortly after daybreak, Feb 2, accounted for an additional 19 enemy killed, five captured and three weapons.

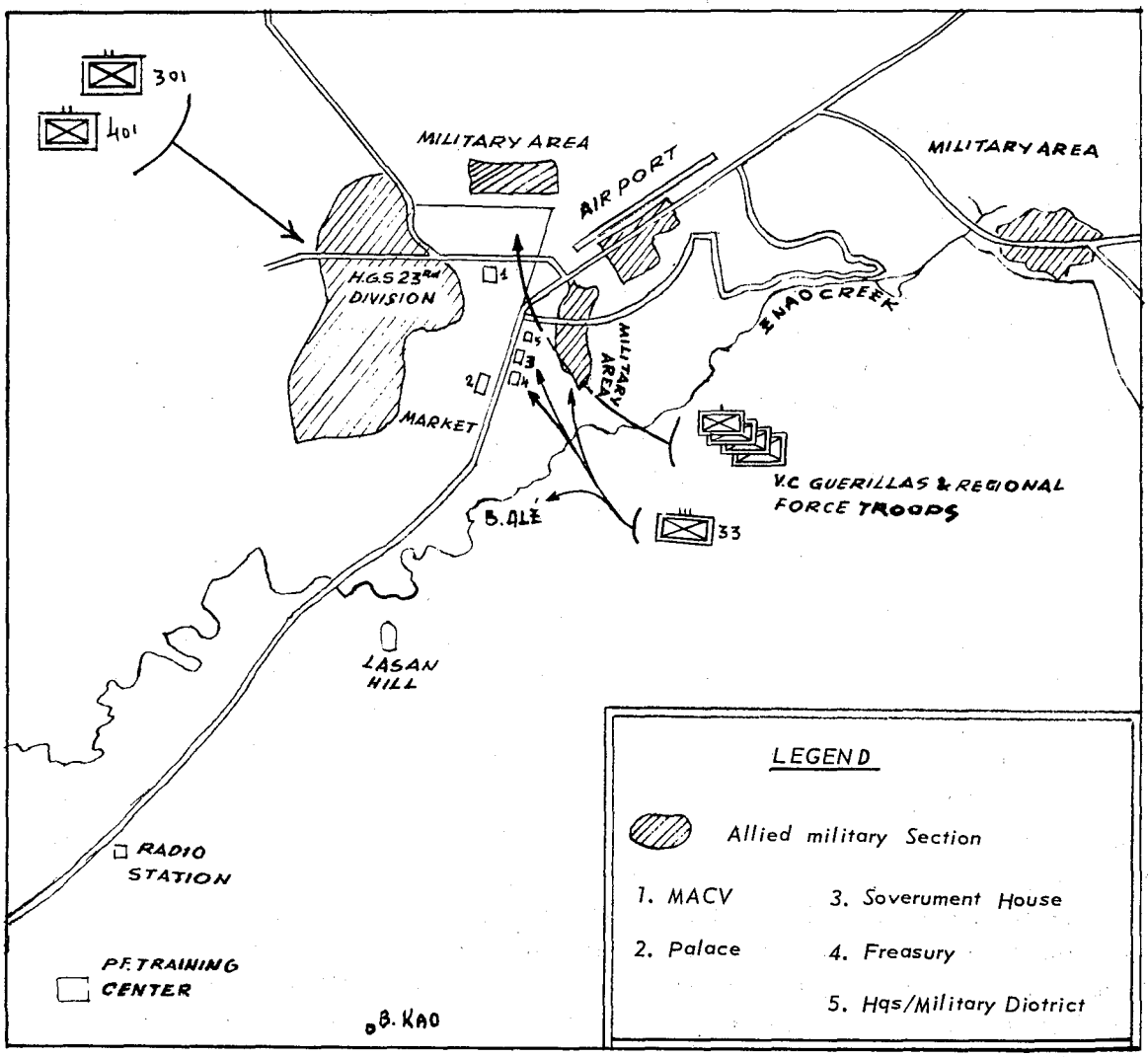
Other units conducting sweep operations with armored support moved up to the besieged radio station and broke the enemy resistance.

The sweep operations continued on Feb 3 in the Cho Nho area and the adjoining Ale hamlet. At this hamlet the 23rd Ranger Battalion found a sizeable mass grave with an estimated 200 enemy bodies. The operation only resulted in scattered, sporadic firefights with unknown results. As darkness fell over the city the enemy again shelled it slamming 122mm rockets into the compounds of the Military Police Company, the intelligence section, the 23rd Ordnance Company and the 23rd Transportation Company. There was only insignificant damage done to these installations and no reported casualties.

On the sixth day of Tet, or Feb 4, government troops carried out the last stage of their sweep operations. There was only one engagement in town involving a pocket of diehard enemy resistance which was positoned on Hoang-Dieu street. This pocket was eliminated in a matter of hours and the entire city was brought back under virtual complete governmental control for the rest of the day.

There was not one single enemy infantry assault anywhere in Banmethuot in the following days and nights. In the daytime government troops continued their systematic searches for possible enemy remnants or suspects hiding among the populace or in the rubble. During darkness and for several nights on end the enemy slammed rocket and mortar rounds into the city's key areas. The enemy still refused to withdraw from the city outskirts. He was regrouping and recuperating for yet another offensive of sorts.

It was not until the night of March 3 or early in the morning of March 4 - or one month after the city returned to government control - that the enemy launched the much awaited second offensive on the city. It was a well coordinated ground and fire supported attack conducted from two sides - north and south. The enemy failed to create even a fraction of the amount and kind of trouble he had caused before. This action cost him over 100 killed. This operation also heralded the end of his Tet offensive, which trailed off with sporadic shellings in the last few nights of the campaign.



Quang Ngai

A. A FEW INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Quang Ngai city is hemmed between two rivers, the larger Tra Khuc River in the north and the smaller Ve River in the south. Both are fordable for most of the year. In the western end of the city there is an airfield capable of taking medium transport and cargo planes. Some eight kms east of the city is the South China Sea. On the eastern and western sides of the city are sugar cane fields. At several places some of these fields thrust into the city itself giving the city a semi-rural look. Towering over the city from the northwest and south respectively are Mont Ong and Mount But. These mountains are good key terrain features which afford government troops control over the city as well as large expanses of flat lands for several kilometers around the city. An artillery platoon was positioned on top of Mount But.

The old city was demolished by the Communist led Viet Minh in the early months of the Indochina War in 1947. It was rebuilt following its takeover by government troops in the wake of the 1954 Geneva Settlement of the Indochina War. The rebuilt city was smaller than the original one which was believed to have been built at the turn of the century.

The city sits astride National Highway No 1 and its main street is coincidentally a small section of this highway which links Saigon to Hanoi. This main street is also the city's business section with concrete shops, offices and businesses lining both sides for several kilometers. First time visitors to the city would find it difficult to tell where the city proper ends on this "highway main street". The ends of the main street belong to the city's suburbs.

The people of the city were predominently non-Communist or anti-Communist. A large part of the population were followers of the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang and Đai Viet Quoc Đang nationalist parties. The remaining people were either government employees or businessmen.

It was because of this demographic background that the enemy was not able to start trouble from inside the city during his

Tet offensive as he did in the case of several other towns and cities. He had to fight all the way from his bases which were far from the city.

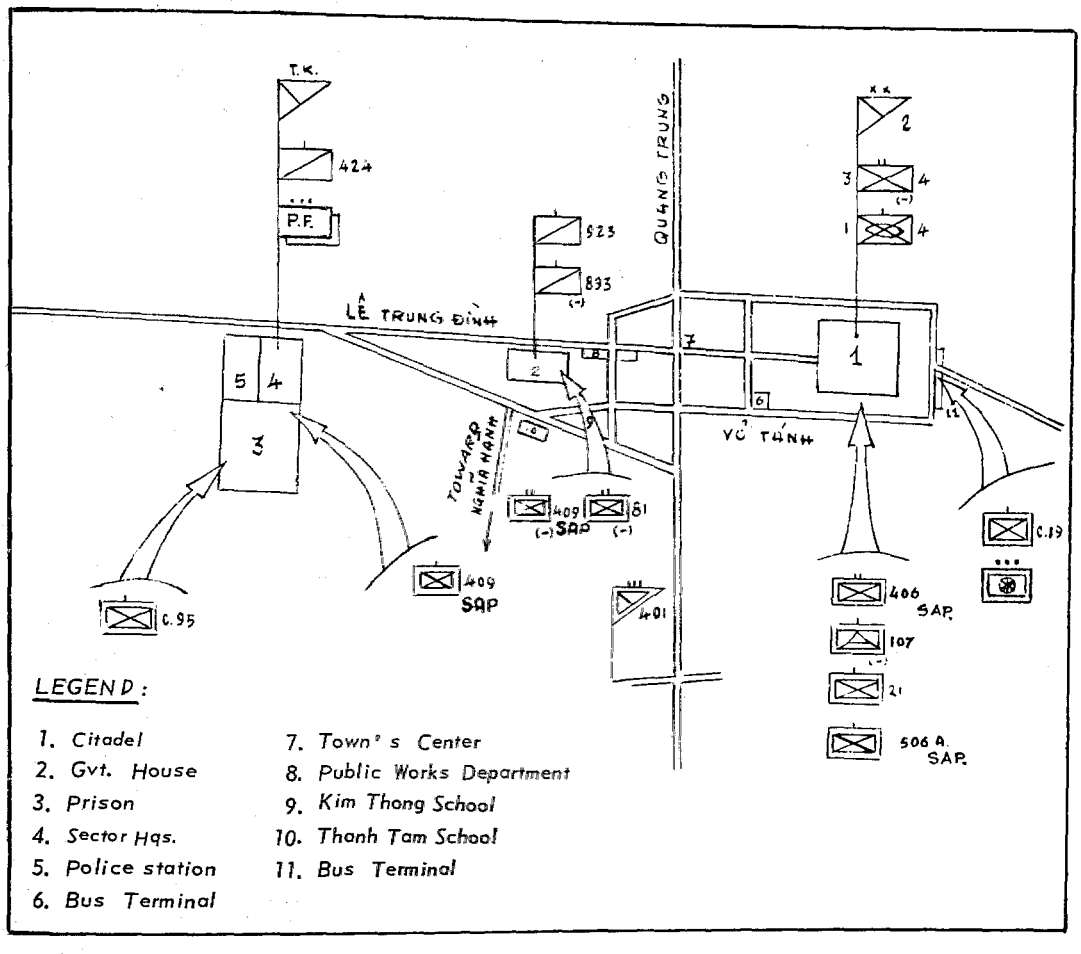
B. DEVELOPMENT OF THE BATTLES

The enemy launched his offensive on Quang Ngai city on the morning of the Second Day of Tet, Jan 31, or more than 24 hours later than his offensives against most other I and II Corps cities. The attack did not start until 0400 hours which was only 2 1/2 hours before daybreak. This time had normally been the time for withdrawal for most guerrilla assault forces in the Vietnam War.

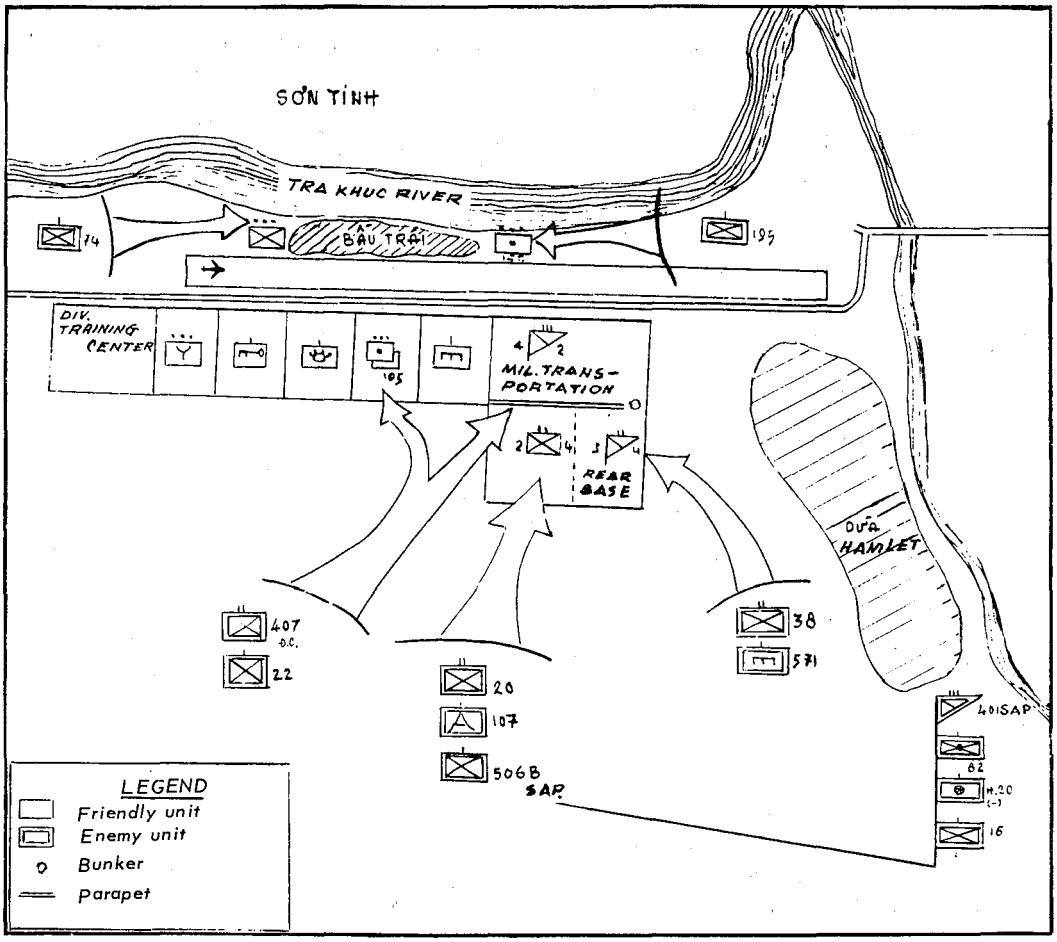
There never was any solid evidence for the reasons behind this delayed action. One educated guess was that the enemy had apparently underestimated the ability of the city defenders to withstand his massive assault. The enemy thought that the city might be taken in a matter of hours. Why did he wait so long to unleash the offensive and thus fight in the daytime, a time which normally favored the Vietnamese forces with their artillery and airstrikes ? Or had there been challenging logistical problems to solve before he could begin his attack ? No enemy documents captured later gave any clue to a firm and clear answer nor did any statements by enemy soldiers captured in action.

The enemy opened a ten minute mortar barrage around 0400 hours on several sensitive areas in town including the 2nd Infantry Division Command headquarters, the RF and PF Training Center on the other side of the Tra Khuc River and other intown military installations such as the airfield and the provincial administration headquarters. The shelling which lacked accuracy and ferocity, caused no casualties and very light damage in the areas of impact. What's more it woke up and prepared the defenders for attacks which soon followed.

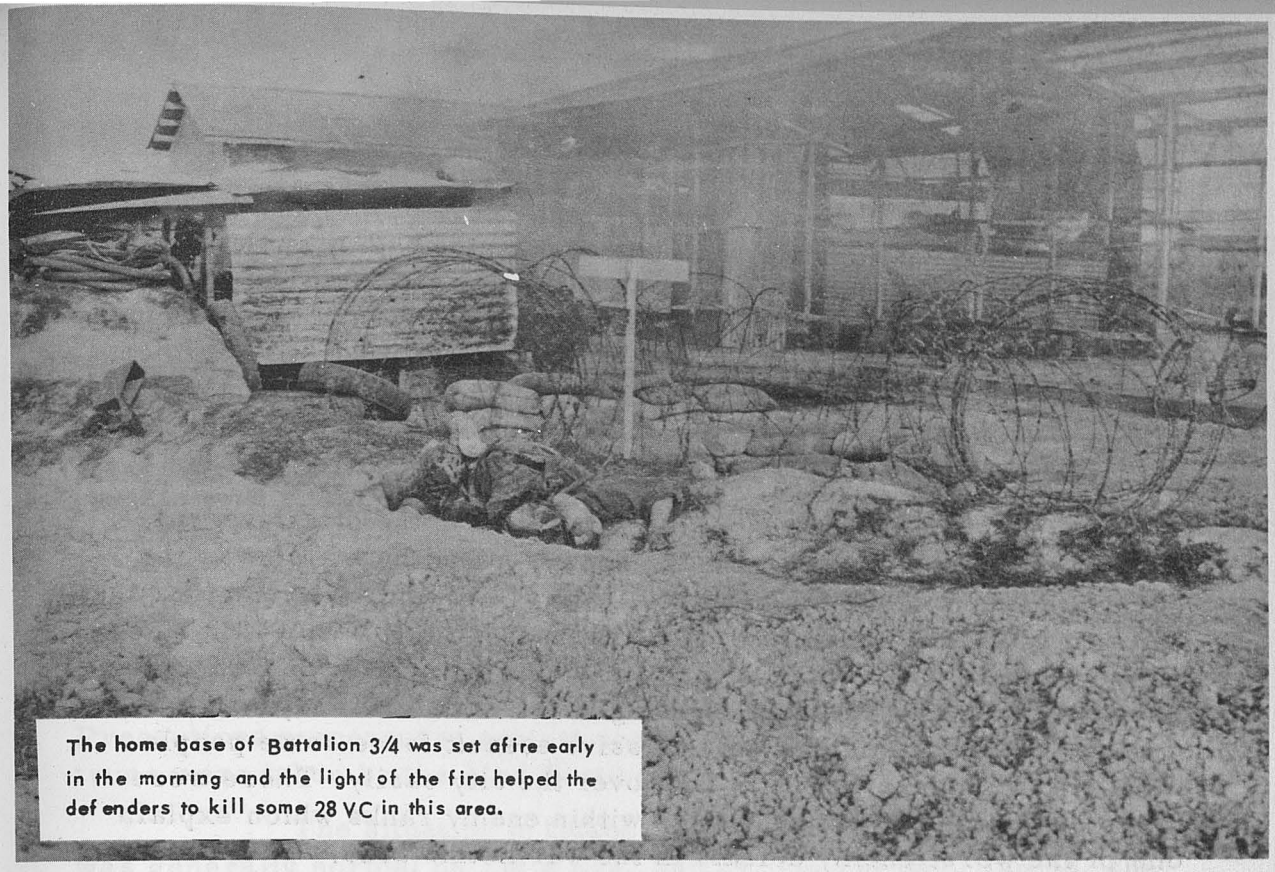
The enemy launched his planned ground assaults as soon as his last round of mortar fire landed in town. Assaults were planned on at least ten military and adminstrative objectives to include the Mount Ong and Mount But bases, the 4th Regiment Command headquarters, the airfield, the city jail, the city police station, the Rural Development Service, the Provincial Administrative Headquarters, the 2nd Division Command and the RF and PF training center.



The enemy attack on the sensitive area in Quang Ngai City



THE ENEMY ATTACK ON THE SENSITIVE AREA IN QUANG NGAI AIRFIELD



The home base of Battalion 3/4 was set afire early in the morning and the light of the fire helped the defenders to kill some 28 VC in this area.



Trenches near the bunker of the local transportation unit through which enemy troops had intended to penetrate the headquarters of the regiment.

Not all these ground assaults were of major dimensions. Only a few installations were hit with a massive enemy onslaught. The other attacks were just scattered diversionary actions. The enemy's major assaults were directed at the 2nd Division Command headquarters, the Provincial Administration Office, the city jail, the 4th Regiment Command compound and the militia training center. Apparently the enemy thought he could take over the entire city by just taking over or paralyzing these sensitive points.

The total enemy force involved in the offensive was estimated at about two regiments. Spearheading the action was the 401st Regiment which included the 406th, 407th and 409th Regular battalions. Additionally there were the 107th, 81st, 38th, 48th and B31st Regional Guerrilla Battalions reinforced by the 506A and 506B Sapper Companies and the 571st Engineer and H20 Transportation Companies. In the light of this massive assault force some people thought that the enemy might take over the city easily. There were many problems and shortcomings within enemy ranks which explain one of the worst enemy defeats in the war in this area.

The enemy had been bitterly defeated in his regimental size assaults on some district towns of Quang Ngai and Quang Tin provinces in the months preceding the Tet offensive. Attacks on the districts such as Hau Duc, Ly Tin and especially Nghia Hanh caused heavy casualties and equipment losses. The ensuing ground operations by Vietnamese and allied forces were even costlier for the enemy and his bases. They were costly to the extent that his ranks were disrupted in many areas and that his morale dropped rapidly. The enemy's Fifth Military Zone Command had to send two additional battalions, the 407th sapper from Kontum and the 409th from Quang-Nam, to reinforce the thinning ranks of Quang Ngai's fighting force. Captured enemy documents showed that the enemy failed to set up any underground espionage cells inside Quang Ngai city, local guerrillas' morale was comparatively poor, and his 4 month old 401st Sapper Regiment was still inexperienced, untested and virtually ineffective. Other enemy documents indicated that the enemy 5th Military Zone Command was dissatisfied with the Quang Ngai command's performance and even accused the latter of over estimating the adversary's strength and morale. The Zone Command ordered the province's Communist force to carry out a three point offensive plan in order to boost the morale of the Quang Ngai guerrilla and main force Communist units. The so called plan claimed that during 1967 the Zone's units killed 20,000 enemy (Vietnamese and allied) troops; downed

1,800 enemy planes and choppers; destroyed 1,800 armored vehicles and paralyzed most of the Vietnamese and allied forces stationed in the zone. It also claimed that the planned Tet offensive would be supported by simultaneous popular uprisings in Quang Ngai and other Zone cities and that there had been a secret agreement with the American forces that these would not move a finger when the Communists launched the Tet offensive. These enemy documents told Communist field commanders and political commissars that the offensive would certainly be a complete success if they followed the offensive blue prints.

The Quang Ngai city defense force and other army units, learning from past experiences with the 1967 Christmas and 1968 New Year truces which the enemy blatantly and seriously violated, were vigilant enough to anticipate enemy troop movements toward the city. Precautionary measures against possible enemy violations of the Tet truce were taken by the 22nd Tactical Zone Command.

The situation in Quang Ngai city and neighboring areas was generally normal on Tet's Eve, Jan 29. On Tet day, Jan 30, the city's key defense and administration agencies were alerted against a possible offensive on Quang Ngai as part of the enemy's general offensive on most cities and towns throughout the country.

Second Division Commander Col Nguyen Van Toan called all the troopers on Tet home leave back to their battle stations. Division Staff Chief Lt Col Pham Cao Đong personally went to each army unit to check on how many men reported to their battle stations. He came to the 2/4 battalion by mid-morning and saw only 50 men. The Battalion's strength rose to 250 men during the afternoon. The same held true of other units whose members had been granted home leave in or around town. He assigned the 3/4 Battalion to guard the Division Command as a reserve force.

Col Dong also ordered the people to stop firing firecrackers. Many people simply ignored this order which was actually an emergency counter order revoking the central government's authorization to set off firecrackers in celebrating the year's greatest festival.

The defense force approached its normal personnel strength by dark. Each and every unit remained in camp waiting, waiting and waiting. Patience wore thin by midnight. Some cursed others for the unjustified trouble. It was absolutely quiet outside the camps and barracks - or apparently so. The populace celebrated the new year



Around the airport of Quang Ngai and amid the sugar cane plantations nearby.



Enemy troop bodies about to be buried.

welcoming ritual as if nothing was going to happen. In the small hours of the night firecrackers were still heard in the various sections of the city.

During Tet day some of the city's defensive units were ordered to change their positions, some were reinforced and some were partly shifted elsewhere. These movement were aimed at disrupting the enemy's intelligence and assault plans.

Opposing the enemy's 48th Battalion and two local guerrilla companies were three PF platoons guarding the RF-PF Training Center. At the citadel the 3/4 Battalion minus, two RF companies minus, the 923rd and 983rd, plus the 1/4 APC Squadron were confronted by the enemy's 406th Sapper Battalion, 506A Sapper Company, 107 PK Battalion, 409th Sapper Battalion, and 84th Battalion also mostly understrength units. To cope with the enemy's C95 Company at the city jail were the 424th RF Company and two understrength PF platoons which normally guarded the sector command compound.

A major enemy force was committed to the assault against the airfield special zone command compound which was also the 4th Infantry Regiment's command headquarters. It included the 401st Regiment with the 407th, 20th and 38th Sapper Battalions as well as six companies C22, C16, C195, C74, 571 and 506B plus an 82mm mortar company. Ranged against these units were the 4/2 Regiment Command's garrison, its Second Battalion, an engineer company, a 105mm howitzer company, a 155mm howitzer platoon and a few miscellaneous units from platoon to company size.

Col. Nguyen Van Toan, Commander of the 12th Tactical Zone, directed the friendly forces' defense and counter-offensive from his headquarters from the beginning of the enemy's action. He was informed of each enemy movement from the east and south toward the headquarters compound through his telephone and radio network. He ordered the 1/4 APC Squadron to maneuver out of the compound to strike the enemy on his flanks some twenty minutes after the enemy assault started. The armor units drove the enemy into neighboring residential areas using lateral formations. Many enemy bodies were left behind at the horsecart station on Vo Tanh road and in the adjoining sugarcane fields. The enemy pressures around the vast zone command compound were broken only one hour later, The enemy chose to defend from the adjoining residential sections, mostly from civilian concrete houses. Not one of the armor vehicles involved in

this armor counterattack was hit by the enemy's deadly rockets. The enemy seemed to have been caught off balance. Some of these armor vehicles blocked the way to further enemy assaults while the others scoured the sugarcane fields for possible enemy survivors.

Prior to daylight no further assaults were launched by the enemy in this sector of the city. The enemy,however, refused to pull out of the residential areas at this time.

The situation on other fronts within the city also improved. All enemy assaults were thrown back except for those against the city jail and the RF-PF Training Center. These were overrun by the numerically superior force and fire power of the enemy shortly after the offensive began during the night. The enemy flew a flag on the hilltop training center and stood his ground waiting for the counterattack from the city defenders.

Air strikes were provided right after daybreak and enemy troops faded into neighboring civilian populated areas for cover. Armed helicopters strafed the jail which had been overrun around 0510 hours. Some 540 prisoners were freed by the enemy but a number of them were recaptured by government troops. The strafing of the jail cost the enemy forty killed. There were 21 prisoners killed and 21 wounded. The enemy's assault on the same jail earlier in the night cost its defenders six killed and eleven wounded. The bulk of the RF garrison at the jail pulled out in the face of the superior enemy force.

The enemy also suffered heavy casualties inflicted by the gunships in the airfield perimeter areas. He had attacked the airfield and the adjoining position of the 4th Regiment. The defenders equipped with the newly supplied M16 automatic rifles, delivered such surprisingly strong firepower against the enemy that it threw his ranks into disorder and rolled back his human wave assaults. The enemy seemed to have been unaware of this new improvement. The rear base of the 3/4 Battalion was overrun at one point and of its 20 defenders only three escaped wounds. Seven were killed and ten wounded. The three survivors joined the Regiment's 22 transportation troopers led by Master Sergeant Tran Quang Tu. After overrunning this rear base the enemy assaulted the Regimental headquarters which was defended by these 22 men plus the three survivors. The enemy was stopped and pinned down by these 25 men. These men occupied all the existing bunkers and fought with machineguns, light machineguns and grenades. Around 0500 hours a building of the 3/4 Battalion's rear base caught

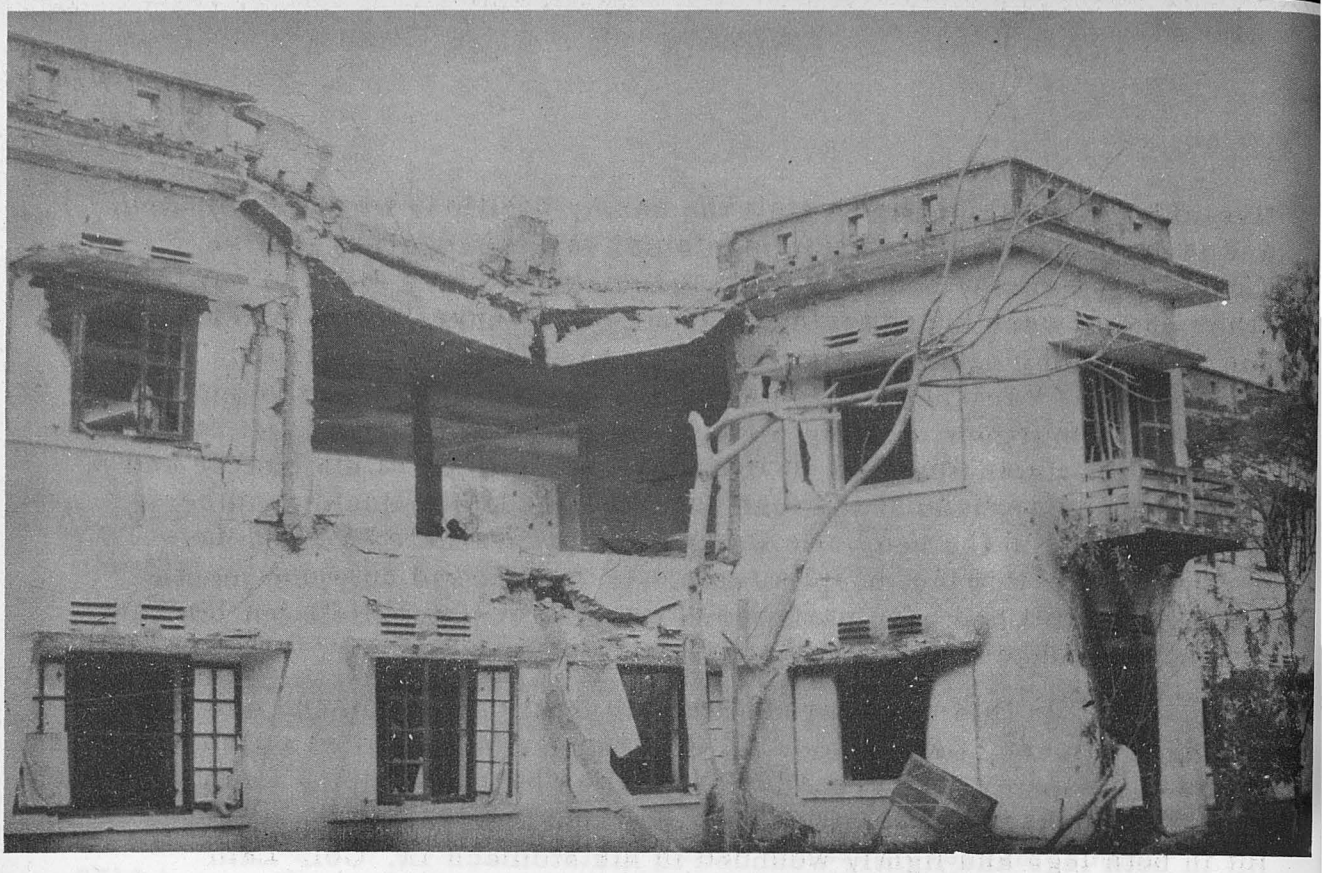
fire. The fire was so big that all the enemy positions were illuminated, and favored the transportation men's delivery of accurate gunfire. Twenty eight enemy bodies were counted at this place alone. Four other enemy were killed trying to knock out a bunker with a machine-gun. The machinegunner, Nguyen Can, was killed by this group. The assistant, Le Van Quoc, machinegunner swiftly took over the gun and fired at the four now only ten meters away from the bunker. He failed to kill them. In an apparent fit of anger Cuoc got out of his bunker and hurled a hand grenade at the four but was shot by the enemy and seriously wounded in the head. He was medically evacuated around daybreak to a US 7th Fleet hospital ship. He returned to duty one month later. His skull had been partly torn away by enemy bullets but his head was patched with a piece of his thigh skin.

In this battle around the 4th Regiment command compound. Regiment Commander Lt. Col Nguyen Van Lam was also wounded by enemy M79 grenade shrapnel as he was jumping from bunker to bunker to urge his men to fight harder against the enemy. Hit in both legs and lightly wounded in his stomach Lt. Col. Lam continued to command his troops till 1000h. at which time he was medically evacuated by an American mercy chopper to a US 7th Fleet hospital ship. He returned to duty after two months treatment. His courage boosted the morale of the outgunned defenders and prevented the enemy from capturing the regimental base.

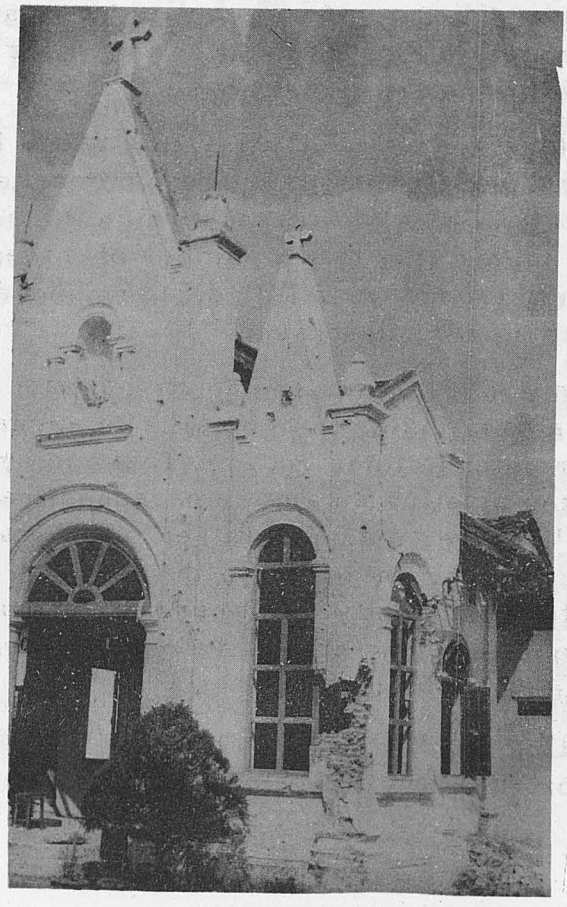
Some 100 enemy were killed in this battle including a deputy battalion commander and one company commander. Five enemy were captured along with 31 weapons which included 16 crew served weapons. The enemy also lost a number of mines and a telephone. Thirteen friendly troops were killed, 44 wounded, nine individual weapons and one binocular destroyed.

The enemy moved from the south and east toward the 2nd Infantry Division's base inside the citadel. He succeeded in breaking through two outer defense lines but only five enemy managed to get into the citadel after blasting an armor personnel carrier blocking the gate. The carrier's driver managed to get out of his burning vehicle but was intercepted by an enemy with a knife. The two engaged in a deadly hand-to-hand fight which resulted in both falling into the fire and burning to death. The other five enemy were killed minutes after they got inside the citadel.

Meanwhile, the 3/4 Battalion led by Captain Nguyen Binh Thuan and supported by the 1/4 APC Squadron counterattacked



The Quang Ngai high school



The Quang Ngai Cathedral



The Quang Ngai prison



Viet Cong prisoners taken in Quang Ngai were mostly teenagers..

the enemy in the residential areas, especially at the Catholic owned Kim Thong school and the citadel's east gate. Throughout the morning neither of these friendly units ever succeeded in relieving enemy pressure from these areas because of the heavy enemy fire. Airstrikes were finally requested in the afternoon with the approval of the school's owner, the local parish priest. Some eighty enemy bodies were counted and 28 weapons, including one flamethrower, were seized in these areas. One armor Lieutenant and five men were killed and 19 men were wounded. One Company from the 3/4 Battalion, which blocked the enemy's route into the city from the east, engaged an advancing enemy force and inflicted serious casualties upon it.

In the east gate battle the 3/4 Battalion was so badly understrength that the Division command had to send one of its own garrison companies to reinforce the battalion. The company's commanding officer Capt Nguyen Van Thanh was killed by enemy sniper fire. Another division staff officer, Lt Dung, was also killed while trying to get back to his house to bring his family out of the enemy controlled area.

It was not until mid morning that an armor unit could be maneuvered into position for counterattack on the enemy held RF-PF Training Center on the other side of the Tra Khuc river. The Center was guarded by over twenty militiamen when the enemy launched the offensive early in the morning. The center's deputy commander, a Lieutenant, was killed along with some of his men. His boss, Maj Te, and the other men withdrew to the Tra Khuc bridge and made their way to the position of the 4/4 Battalion for a counterattack. The hill-top center was lost to the enemy without the knowledge of the 4/4 Battalion. Thus, when some of the enemy came down the hill, the bridge guards thought they were RD cadre and did not open fire.

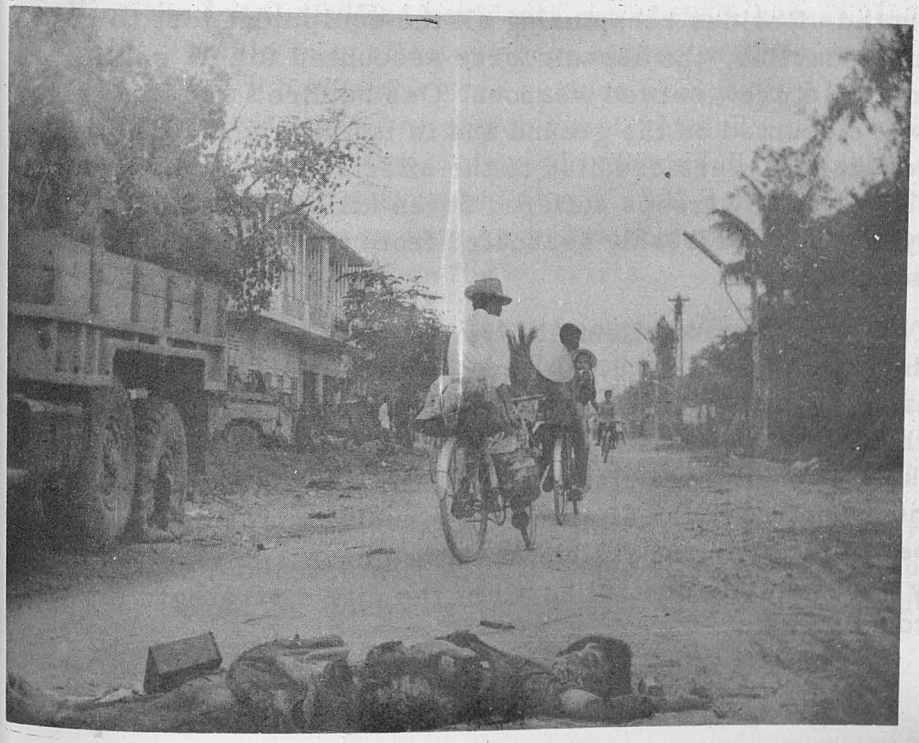
Actually only one company of the 4/4 Battalion was stationed at the Tra-Khuc bridge. The other two companies were being positioned about three and four kilometers away when the enemy started the offensive. The enemy was not aware of this fact and thus left the outnumbered Tra Khuc bridge guards alone when he stormed into the training center. He only fired one round of 60mm mortar at the bridge wounding two medics, 3rd Lt Hoa and Corporal Quy.

This was the third time in one year that this training center had fallen into enemy hands. One time the enemy disguised themselves as local villagers and came to watch the movie and then took over the center in a surprise raid.





Vo Tanh street, Quang Ngai just after the battle.



When Maj Te the center superintendant and his men reached the bridge, the 4/4 Battalion Commander, Maj Luong Van Hoi, welcomed him into the camp and positioned the militiamen along the defense perimeter.

Around 0900 hours Col. Toan led a relief column supported by armored vehicles and Maj Hoi's understrength 4/4 Battalion toward an assault on the enemy held hilltop training center. Two gunships circled over the enemy positions and accounted for several enemy casualties. The enemy could not fight back from their exposed foxholes on the hill. They ran for cover in the center's four bunkers in order to fight the relief column. Col Toan ordered the armored carriers to attack uphill but one received a direct hit from an enemy 57mm recoilless cannon and burst into flames. The explosion scattered debris and shrapnel for several meters wounding the Battalion's American advisor, among others. The armored vehicles could not continue the attack uphill any longer not only because of the heavy firepower from enemy positions but also because of the hill's fairly steep slope. Col Toan ordered 4/4 Battalion to launch an assault within 15 minutes and recapture the hill. The gunships continued to give close air support from the skies while the armored vehicles and other support units provided covering fires to the assaulting force which was led by Maj Hoi. This assault force moved uphill fairly fast in lateral formations and as soon as it reached the top of the hill, it used hand grenades and wiped out all of the enemy diehards positioned in the four bunkers. The entire enemy force originally committed to take this hill was virtually eliminated. Besides recapturing all the equipment lost to the enemy a few hours earlier, the assault force accounted for 92 enemy weapons, including 16 crew served weapons. One hundred and eighteen enemy bodies were counted on the ground and in bunkers and foxholes. Many of these casualties were credited to the effective strafing by the two gunships. The friendly troops suffered seven killed including a signal Lieutenant Nguyen Duc Thu freshly graduated from the Thu Đuc Officers' Training School.

The guns became silent all over the hill area around 1115 hours. The people of Quang Ngai heard of the victory and swarmed to the area to see for themselves. Sporadic fighting was still going on elsewhere in the city with government troops trying to destroy other pockets of enemy resistance. The entire city was back under government control in the afternoon. Friendly troops continued their sweep operations against possible enemy remnants during the rest of the day and virtually controlled all of the city's strategic points, bases and thoroughfares.

On the second day of Tet, Jan 31, the enemy launched desperate assaults on the post office and the radio station. He was thrown back at both places.

A number of enemy troops who were lost or hidden in populated areas continued taking potshots at government troops. A determined sweep operation was conducted in all suspect areas with no significant results. The city was back to normal a few day later except for the long curfew imposed on its civilian population. At night the enemy slammed mortar shells into the city in a campaign of harassment. The shelling continued for two weeks in succession.

The Tet offensive cost the enemy an estimated 500 killed, including 100 in the airfield perimeter areas, over 100 at the RF-PF Training Center and nearly 200 inside the city. 300 assorted weapons were seized and a number of others captured in action throughout the town.

The friendly side suffered 56 killed, 138 wounded and one missing. Forty three assorted weapons, mostly individual weapons, were destroyed by hostile fire during the fighting.

C. SIDELIGHTS OF THE FIGHTING

When the enemy troops invaded populated areas they sent all of the local civilian residents out of their homes toward safer areas. People in unaffected areas closed their houses and stayed home. Many of them however, were curious enough to follow government tanks and armored carriers on counterattack operations to watch the fighting. Generally the city people seemed disciplined and calm. Enemy agents led a crowd of about 1,000 people from the Thien An Mountain area into an anti-government march on the city. This march was swiftly dispersed on the outskirts.

The fighting caused comparatively high civilian casualties in the city; 61 were killed and 22 wounded. There were even higher casualties among people in district towns scattered thoughout the area. District residents suffered 322 killed and 315 wounded. The province of Quang Ngai lost a total of 383 civilians killed and 337 wounded.

Civilian property damage throughout the province was generally moderate with 1,093 houses completely destroyed and 927 lightly damaged. Included in this total were the 122 structures

destroyed and 188 damaged inside Quang Ngai city. A large number of these were thatched or semi-concrete houses.

The local government provided 4,000 piastres to each of the victims' families for each person killed and 2,000 piastres for each person wounded. The victims also received other emergency relief supplies and building materials to help them rebuild their houses. The relief supplies included canned food, rice, milk, clothing etc. The building materials included cement and tin roofing. The province had been releasing large amounts of relief funds from its budget since 1965 when the enemy started increasing military pressures on it. There were 68 refugee centers throughout the province. Son Tinh district alone had 31 centers. The 68 centers sheltered a total of 66,749 refugees living in abject poverty and virtually jobless. Worse still a number of these centers became targets for enemy terror shellings. Of the total of 8,842 refugee houses in these 68 centers 1,232 were destroyed or collapsed by enemy mortar and rocket shells. In Duc Pho District 1,878 refugees were made homeless when their camp with 115 houses was burned down by terrorists.

Five refugee camps in Nghia Hanh district were likewise destroyed by enemy terrorists resulting in another 7,493 persons becoming homeless. From a combined total of 735 houses in the district, 442 were pulled down, collapsed or burned down. Some 394 people unable to wait for new shelters left the area for unknown destinations. Terrorists killed 39 of the Nghia Hanh refugees and abducted another 40 who were never heard of again and were thus presumed dead. The civilian casualties resulting from enemy shellings were never counted but were believed to be numerous. At stages of the war the shellings were almost daily occurrences.

The war profiteers, blackmarketeers and racketeers of various sorts added to these miseries of war suffered by these unfortunate Quang Ngai people. Four of these dishonest cheaters were arrested and lined up before a crowd along with eleven teenage enemy captives. The war profiteers were paraded by the local administration in order to warn them against pursuing their path of crimes.

The enemy Tet truce violations and offensive obviously did extensive harm to the city and its people and defenders, but these violations also benefited them. These violations taught them the lesson of unity and determination, and motivated them into joining in a do or die struggle against the enemy and his cohorts.

Popular resentment against Communism became greater and deeper. The provincial administration seized the opportunity to organize an anti-Communist popular movement called "Let's Rise Up And Destroy Communism". A mass meeting was held Feb 16 at the provincial administration headquarters. At this meeting leading civic, political and religious representatives worked out a crash program of self-defense, rehabilitation of the city and refugee relief.

A giant defense perimeter was set up around the city with, among other things, eight solid sandbagged and concrete bunkers. Several streets became restricted areas and the populace had to make long detours to go in and out of their homes on shopping, marketing and other business trips. Checkpoints were manned by part-time militiamen as well as full-time regular troops. Unused railroad equipment was also dismantled to buid bunkers, pillboxes and watch-towers. The populace energetically engaged in a campaign of building sandbagged shelters against enemy shellings. This activity reached such a pitch that the blackmarket prices of sand and bags soared with each passing day. Travel restrictions were imposed on the people to the point where each citizen had to apply for a special pass to enable him to go from one district to another, even between those a few kilometers apart.

This campaign backfired in some cases, since it affected business and economic activities of local people adversely. Bureaucracy added to these and other difficulties. These problems were solved gradually as the situation improved and returned to complete normalcy.

The Quang Ngai offensive served to boost the morale of the people because the Communists conducted it in violation of the Tet truce and thereby suffered the highest number of casualties ever. Young men volunteered for the military service. Conscription calls were answered by 100% for the first time in the war. Most if not all of the local armed units also reached full strength for the first time. Replacements were easier to come by. Draftdodging was virtually non existent. The people took the enemy campaign of terror shellings and sneak attacks in stride and as a way of life. Fewer and fewer tears were shed over the dead. Anger and hatred filled the people's hearts for the enemy's wanton acts of terrorism. Stories told of teenage girls and old people volunteering for militia service. The line was definitely drawn between friend and foe. Each and every citizen felt he had gotten the opportunity to do something to help his fellow

citizens and himself to survive yet another enemy offensive. His morale was admirably high.

D. LESSONS LEARNED

Enemy tactical shortcomings :

First, began the attack too late - 0400 hours - therefore time of darkness was very short for his attack.

Second, lack of command and control between the force occupying the dominating area in the RF/PF training center which is located on the other side of the Tra Khuc river and his main force in the city, the main force(48th VC Regiment) was fragmented and annihilated, although they had enough time to withdraw.

Third, conducted raid with a superior force tactic but his preperatory fire was too weak and directed on too many objectives to be effective.

Thanks to these shortcomings friendly forces had time to brace themselves for their own defense and their later counterattack. The enemy suffered heavy casualty when attacking the 4th regimental base camps because of faulty coordination between the fire support base and the ground assault force.

The enemy, however, obtained the element of surprise by moving his troops into the city without being detected .

Friendly advantages were :

First, fast movement of armored vehicles to break up all enemy formations, armored vehicles mounted their counterattack only 20 minutes after the enemy initiated his offensive. The open area on Vo Tanh street facilitated the armored vehicle movement in performing their missions.

Second, although understrength because of Tet leave friendly forces took defensive measures beforehand and by quickly occupying fortified defensive positions effectively repelled enemy assaults. Some positions, however, were overrun because of lack of preparation.

Nha Trang

A. - THE BALANCE SHEET

During the Tet offensive, Nha Trang as well as Qui Nhon are two first coastal provinces which were unexpectedly attacked by the enemy in the very midst of Tet truce - Tet eve. Nha Trang eastern and western villages are composed of 119,000 people which may total nearly 200,000 when the suburban people are included.

Nha Trang, like many other cities of South Vietnam, suffered damage during the offensive but the damage here was relatively less than in other cities. Civilian suffered 32 killed, 137 light and severe wounded and 3,192 people were made homeless. An estimated 600 houses were destroyed.

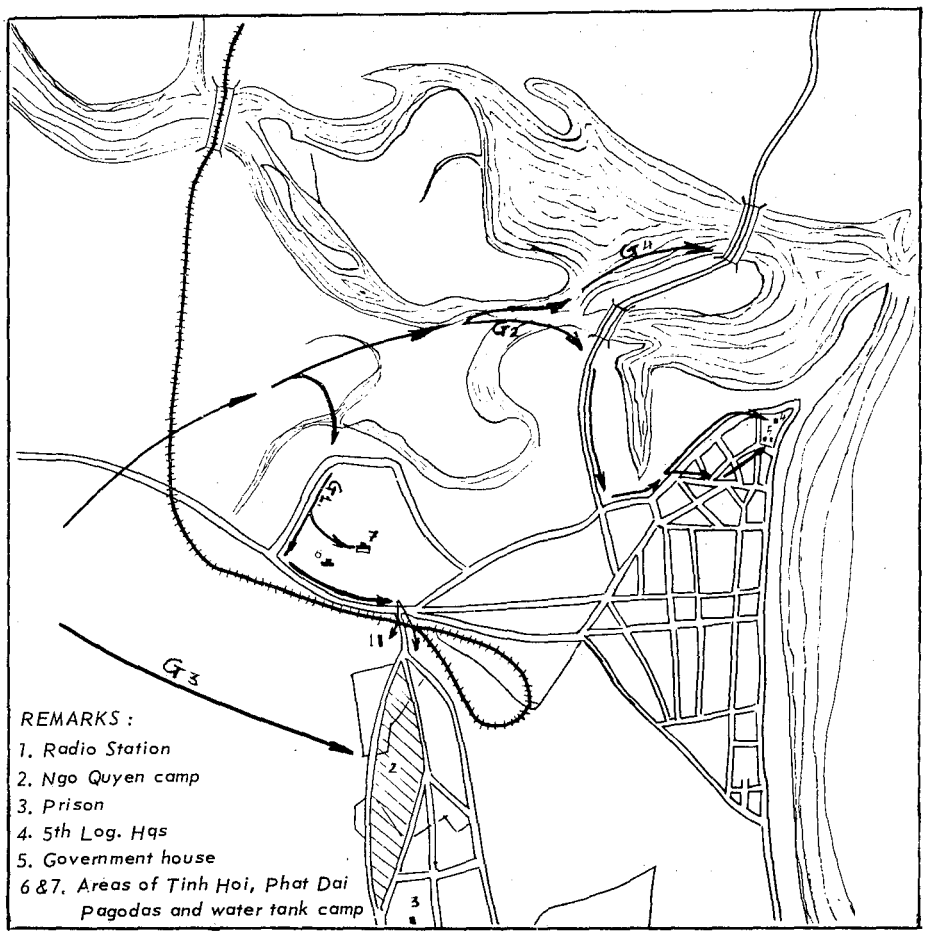
On military point of view, Nha Trang is an important city with several installations and military camps. During Tet offensive not a single allied installations was attacked. The enemy was only attacking a few Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) installations and was able to break into the Sector Command, the Province Administrative Headquarters and the 5th Logistics Command. He was repelled at other compounds.

The fighting lasted for two days but twelve hours after the offensive was initiated RVNAF regained complete control of the city and twenty eight hours later every enemy was cleared from the city.

The casualty lists of the two sides were as follows :

Friendly side : 88 killed and 220 wounded in action, 130 weapons were lost including two which were crew served. Among those killed were six officers, 17 noncoms, 2 PF squad leaders and 63 soldiers. Those wounded included 9 officers, 12 noncoms, 3 squad leaders and 197 soldiers.

Enemy side : 377 killed, 76 captured, one surrendered, 196 weapons were seized, including 23 crew served weapons.



THE ENEMY ATTACKS IN NHA TRANG CITY

B. THE NHA TRANG BATTLE IN DETAIL.

Like their counterparts in other towns and cities of Viet Nam the top Nha Trang military commanders had anticipated the enemy's Tet offensive many hours before it really materialized. They did not know exactly how soon and when. Indications of major enemy troop movements toward the city limits confirmed earlier sketchy intelligence reports of the offensive plans.

First to be detected was the enemy's Regiment 18B reinforced by four sapper companies, four provincial mobile companies and one engineer company. All told the regiment had three combat battalions and 8 combat support companies. Well before Tet, the enemy stepped up his pressures on the outer perimeter of Nha Trang. The friendly forces, Vietnamese and Korean, retaliated with ground sweeps which covered tens of square kilometers. The 9th Korean (White Horse) Division bore the brunt of these sweeps. Enemy field commanders, also well before Tet, had to study and discuss the implementation of the North Vietnamese Communist Party's Resolution No 13 governing the enemy's Winter-Spring Campaign. This campaign included two stages - preparatory and offensive - to be carried out before, during and after Tet.

The enemy dared not launch the offensive before Tet. Local troop commander judged that the enemy would not be so shameless as to violate the Tet truce so blatantly and carry out the offensive during the period. They guessed that the enemy would launch the offensive sometime after the truce ended or soon thereafter. Their estimates proved wrong and the enemy capitalized handsomely on the factor of surprise - at least in the first few hours of the offensive.

The enemy started their offensive with the firing of six rounds of 82mm mortar on the Navy Training Center. All six shells landed outside the center. It was 35 minutes past midnight or 35 minutes after the Lunar New Year. Immediately after the shelling. flare ships from the 62nd Air Squadron became airborne. Counter-battery fire was also provided. Then it was all quiet again at least for a while.

It was not until 2 AM, or some 85 minutes after the initial mortar fire, that the enemy launched the infantry assault on the city. According to statements by a captured enemy mortar man the six mortar rounds should have been closely followed by the planned ground assault. The delay might have been caused by belated troop

movement into the city. The mortar crews in charge of supporting the assault were of company size, stationed just west of the airfield. They were elements of the enemy's 18B Regiment. They fired both 82mm mortars and 75mm recoilless rifles.

Nha Trang, like many other towns and cities of Vietnam, celebrated the holiday in a most tumultuous way. Days before Tet Day the people were ready to prepare the festivities. There was so much shopping that many shops sold out their wares as early as three days before the holiday really started. A pack of some 100 firecrackers costs the consumer 80, then 100 and then 150 piastres. This was the first Tet in eight years where the central government in Saigon allowed everyone to enjoy the traditional firecrackers.

By the time both the local and central governments were fully aware of enemy general offensive plans against all towns and cities it was too late to persuade people to abstain from setting off fire crackers. The explosions of firecrackers sound almost like those of many small arms.

Nha Trang's downtown streets were still crowded by midnight on Tet's Eve. The crowds of merrymakers were far larger than those noticed on preceding Tets. This alone encouraged people to set off even more firecrackers than usual. The firecrackers confused the situation when the enemy fired his mortars signaling the ground assault. The lack of vigilance among the troopers added to the confusion. After Province Chief Lt Col Le Khanh hurried back to his headquarters from a traditional religious service at Thap Ba shrine the mortar shells hit the city.

According to enemy documents and captives' statements the enemy committed an estimated 800 men to the ground assault. These men were divided into two groups, the first with some 500 men and the second with 300.

Group I included the 7/18B Battalion with 200 men, the Sapper Company T88 with 60 men, the Engineer Company T89 with 30 men, the Sapper company K90 with 26 men, the Sapper Company K91 with 30 men, the Sapper Company K92 with 11 men, the 82mm Mortar and 75mm Recoilless Rifle Company with 50 men, the Nha-Trang Guerrilla Platoon with 14 men, the command and support personnel staff with ten men and women, and an estimated 100 town-based underground agents. This group had partly infiltrated the city several days before the actual assault started. They infiltrated by twos, threes or



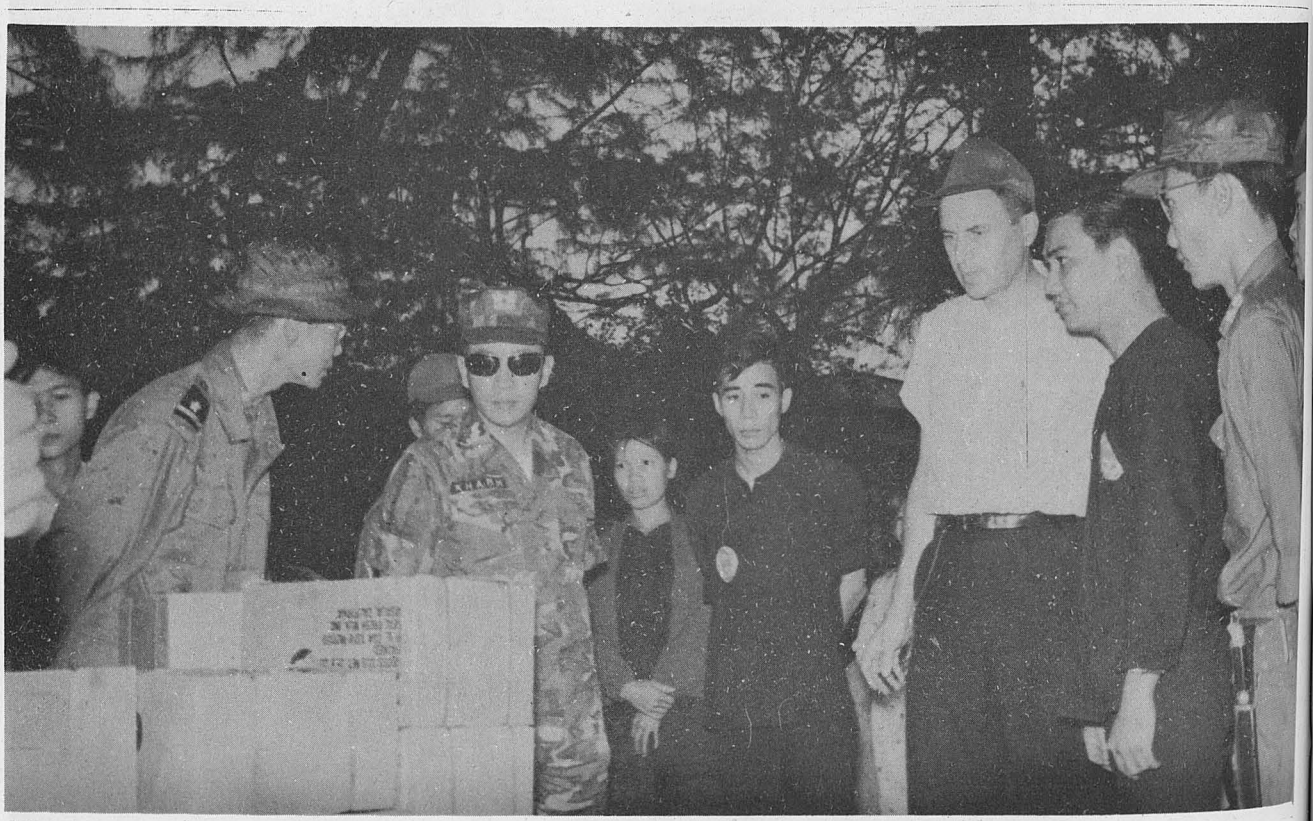
The government House in Nhatrang



An ICC team inspecting material found
on a dead Viet Cong.



A view of the city after the fight.



LTC Le Khanh during a distribution of goods to war victims.

larger bands using forged identification. The underground agents had lived in town for some time or had been city residents with adequate and regular identifications. This was the first time they surfaced from their underground status in order to openly fight city defenders. The larger part of this Group emerged from the Dong Bo (Ox Field) jungle war zone.

Group I split into five task teams : Team I attacking the city's western section with the radio station, the Ngo Quyen Camp, the railroad station area and water Tank Hill ; Team II striking the city's eastern section with the provincial administration headquarters, the Khanh Hoa Sector Command and the Fifth Logistics Command compound ; Team III striking the city's southwestern section with the camps of the 651st Signals Company, the 51st Transportation Battalion, the army stockade and the Pontoon Engineer Company ; Team IV attacking the northern section of the city with the mission of blowing up the Xom Bong bridge and blocking reinforcement from the Noncom Training School ; Team V serving as the artillery support unit.

Group II included only two companies of the understrength 8/18B Battalion with a combined total of about 300 men. Its assignment was to block government reinforcement and relief troops. It performed this mission in the Binh Cang area.

In addition the enemy also kept two reserve companies of the 9/18B Battalion to bolster the 8/18B Battalion in case the latter moved into town.

The enemy's subsidiary political and agit-prop units in Dien Khanh district, according to enemy documents, were assigned to herd civilians in and out of town and into anti-government demonstrations and riots. Their purpose was to give the enemy ground offensive a strong touch of a people's revolution to overthrow the local government. The enemy had planned to conduct four such demonstrations which were to start from the Phuong Cui, Phuong Sai, Cau Ha and Cho Dam areas outside the city. These demonstrations were to converge on the Cong Hoa (Republican) Square which was opposite the province's information service building. In addition the enemy planned to lead two marches from the city's suburbs into town. These and other marches had been conceived to bolster the proposed Khanh Hoa Alliance for Democracy and Peace and to demand that the allied troops pull out of Vietnam and "stop interfering in Vietmese affairs".

The enemy field commanders and ranking political leaders and agents had been informed of the Nha Trang offensive plans during an elaborate political study conference held in the Dong Bo war zone from Jan 21 to 25, 1968. This was about a week before Tet.

The enemy troops were ordered to follow the plans at all costs, and among other things, not to start the ground action until the mortar company gave the go-ahead. The 85 minute delay in the enemy's ground assault was thought to have been caused by movement difficulties encountered somewhere between his jungle bases and staging areas.

Team I of Group I struck the city's radio station from the provincial pagoda Tinh Hoi where its 240 men had rendezvoused around midnight. The team occupied the Buddha Statue or water tank Hill and quietly set up its command on top of the hill. This team included the Sapper Company T88, the Company 2/7/18B, elements of the 75mm recoilless cannon company and political cadre. The Team was detected by friendly troops guarding the radio station and neighboring office buildings sometime before the actual assault on the station was launched.

The radio station's security guards numbered about 20 men from the 381st RF Company led by Master Sergeant Dao Huu Ngoc, a seasoned soldier with a nineteen years of military service. The enemy's infiltration of the station area was first noticed by Corporal Le Van Thang who saw two Lambretta minibuses with ARVN uniformed passengers hurriedly disembarking and furtively moving into the nearby pagoda compound. The corporal radioed the Special Zone Command for a check on the identity of these "soldiers". His telephone line with his immediate superiors at the sector command had been cut off probably by enemy agents. When the answer over the PRC. 10 radio identified the "soldiers" as enemy the corporal told his men to rush to battle stations. He himself manned a light machinegun from an elevated bunker. He fired a few shots into an open field opposite the station to test the suspect soldiers. They immediatly returned the fire. These return shots were enough to tell foes from friends since VC soldiers were taught to return fire instinctively against the area from which hostile fire orginated. That was the extent of this brief exchange of gunfire. Calm returned to the area, however, tension inside the radio station built up. It was about 30 minutes past midnight.

The defenders of the radio station waited and waited until about 3 AM. when the enemy launched the assault on the station. The enemy concentrated his push on the right side of the station employing B40 rockets to break through its defense. The firefight lasted

two hours. During this time airdropped flares illuminated the battle area for the defenders. The enemy could never break through any defense lines. Shortly before daybreak he withdrew into neighboring civilian houses. From these houses he took potshots at the defenders' positions. Several enemy bodies were left behind and scattered all over the place.

The enemy did not surprise the radio station guards when he occupied the Buddha Statue or water tank Hill. He did surprise the hill's small militia guard detail. None of the five militiamen stationed there was aware of the enemy occupation of the hill until 3 AM. when an army 3rd Lieutenant happened to take a motor bike ride up the hill and then fled as he noticed the enemy presence there. He was killed before he could escape. Some of the Lieutenant's fellow celebrants were also hit. Others escaped.

Alerted by the gunfire the five militamen reacted. But it was two late. The numerically superior enemy gunned them all down, killing three and wounding two then occupying the entire hill. The enemy then set up his heavy weapons on the hill and opened up at the radio station in support for his assault force, but to no avail. The solidly entrenched radio station defenders stood their ground.

Meanwhile Team II struck the sector command compound. Its 130 men were elements of the sapper companies K90; K91 and K92, and the Company 3/7/18B. It assaulted the sector compound, the province administrative headquarters and the 5th Logistics Command compound around 2 AM. The companies K90 and K91 with 56 men moved from the Lo Voi area aboard a small bus and three Lambretta minibuses. These apparently were robbed from civilians. The K92 with 11 men moved in from Binh Cang area on Highway I aboard a Lambretta minibus.

The K90 and K91 men killed four soldiers and wounded two duty officers at the sector command and province administrative headquarters. Lt Lan and 2nd Lt Phuc were the 2 officers wounded. Master Sergeant Pham,the province chief's body guard, was on a jeep reconnaissance when he heard firing. He was cut down the moment he was on his jeep to investigate. K92 men killed the front gate guard at the 5th Logistics Command compound. They entered the compound and killed another eleven men and wounded eight. Those killed included three officers, Lt Nguyen Se, 3rd Lt Chu and 2nd Lt Trinh Ba Tuan. The guard detail chief, Master Sergeant Nguyen Nhon, was also killed.

Lt Tuan was killed while sleeping. After daybreak the 5th Logistics Deputy Chief of Staff for Polwar Major Duong Van Sang, thinking that the enemy had withdrawn after the assault, as was his custom previously , came to the compound with some of his men to recover the wounded for medical vacuation. Enemy troops allowed his men to do this task. The Major entered even further into the compound before the enemy opened fire. The Major was killed instantly by a burst of submachine-gun fire. He was killed near the flagpole in the middle of the compound's front yard.

Around 2 AM the enemy's Team III with 3 men of the Company 1/7/18B, a squad of the Sapper Company T88 and the Nha Trang Politico-Admin Platoon assaulted the 651st Signal Battalion's base camp. The assault force,supported by heavy weapon fire, tried to break through the main gate but was thrown back. In the early minutes of the enemy assault two noncoms and one officer were wounded.

The enemy's Team IV, for unknown reasons, did not carry out its assigned mission on Tet's Eve.

One of the city's main military camps, the Special Forces Command compound was not attacked. From this compound the SF Commander, General Doan Van Quang closely followed the enemy's maneuver from its beginning. He directed the counterattack which took place one hour later. General Quang was also Commander of the Nha Trang City garrison and of the Nha Trang Special Zone. He had authority to commit any Vietnamese units stationed in and outside the city.

Spearheading the counterattack was the 91st Airborne Ranger Battalion. This Battalion had returned to its Nha Trang home base only two days before for rest and recuperation following lengthy sweep operations in Pleiku. Only 60 per cent of its personnel was physically able to carry out combat duties in Nha Trang. During the counterattack four of five of the battalion's commanders were lost in fierce backyard confrontations with the enemy. This high casualty rate shows that the leaders led by preceding their troops. Among the battalion leaders killed were the Battalion Commander, Maj Le Nhu Tu, who died of a serious small arms wounds some 23 days after he was hit on Tet Day; the battalion's 4th Company Commander, Lt Tung, the Deputy Battalion Commander, and two company commanders were wounded and hospitalized.The understrength battalion suffered a total of 18 killed and 32 wounded. Unquestionably this battalion had saved Nha-Trang from devasting destruction similar to that which had

occured in many other cities and towns of the country. The 91st Airborne Ranger Battalion played a key and decisive role in curtailing the Nha Trang Battle in a surprisingly short period of time. They drove the enemy out of the city far sooner than generally expected.

The Special Forces Command also had four CIDG companies in addition to the 91st Airborne Ranger Battalion. Three of these companies were deployed out of town and the fourth was performing routine garrison chores in town.

When the news of the enemy ground offensive reached the Command headquarters it reacted like this :

0230 hours : Immediately after the 651st Signal Battalion came under attack the 62nd Air Squadron was ordered to drop flares. Fifteen minutes later, a CIDG company was sent to block the enemy's assault route against the second zone of the sensitive area, to protect the west side of the signal battalion's position, the stockade and the radio station.

Noncom military school was ordered to move one company to block Xom Bong bridge. The 2nd Corps coast guard was requested to increase patrolling along the coast off the Province Headquarters (enemy was suspected of moving by boat).

0300 hours : Informed of the enemy assaults on the sector compound and the province administration, lost telephone and radio contact with these installations (At the province administration headquarters there was one special radio set up linking it to the Special Force Command. The PRC.10 radio was destroyed by the enemy who killed its custodian, Master Sergeant Pham, who died resisting the enemy assaults into his radio room). The news confused the command even further. No decision.

0315 hours : Assigned a company from the 91st Airborne Ranger Battalion to stand by as a reserve unit inside the SF command compound. Placed another company of this same battalion on alert.

0345 hours : A police force reported that it had been intercepted at the sector compound; Special Police reported enemy assaults on the sector and the Special Police headquarters and called for reinforcements.

0400 hours : Released the two Airborne Ranger companies to rescue the Special Police Headquarters and the sector compounds

These two companies easily relieved the enemy pressure on the police compound. The two companies, reinforced by a police detail led by the police chief, an army major, moved along Doc Lap and then Phan Boi Chau streets to assault the 5th Logistics headquarters compound. They then moved on to the sector compound a block away. Upon reaching this compound the relief force received fierce enemy fire and was pinned down. This fire hit the Airborne Ranger Battalion commander, Major Le Nhu Tu. Enemy fire power was so strong that the Special Zone Command had to send another Airborne Ranger Company to relieve the enemy pressure.

At the same time the enemy was still occuping the Buddha Statue Hill. They were also surrounding the radio station and threatening the positions of the signal battalion, the transportation battalion, the pontoon engineer company and the stockade. This stockade also served as the city jail which contained some 2,000 inmates. To include 600 political prisoners.

The enemy continued firing from neighboring civilian houses, gardens and the Buddha Statue Hill. On this hill he had set up his advance assault command. This unit was tasked to initiate civic disturbances as soon as the city's key military and administrative agencies had been taken over. For this and other purposes the enemy forbade people to evacuate their houses. Many of the people managed to get out of the fighting areas anyhow. At this time the city looked like a ghost town. All the streets were deserted. Those private homes which were not occupied by the enemy were firmly closed as were the minor government offices left untouched.

The 554th CIDG Company was then assigned to recapture the Buddha Statue Hill. This company, reinforced by a CIDG platoon, moved into the target area from two sides under company commander Ha Minh Trung. From daybreak till 2 PM there was fighting all over the hill and pagoda area. The CIDG men supported by airstrikes launched three assaults to retake the entire area and relieve the enemy pressure on the radio station and adjoining compounds. Thirteen enemy bodies were left behind.

The two CIDG companies, which were ordered to return from their night positions four kilometers northwest of Nha Trang to rescue the city, were engaged by the enemy's Battalion 8/18B on the city's outskirts. Airstrikes were called in and the ensuing battle resulted in 30 enemy killed, nine captured and 20 assorted weapons seized.

The CIDG companies suffered seven killed and ten wounded. The decimated enemy battalion withdrew to the west.

On Tet Day morning, Jan 30, enemy agents marshalled a civilian demonstration with about 200 banner and flag-waving people from Dien Khanh district. The crowd dispersed swiftly after its Communist leaders were shot and arrested. Among the leaders were two enemy agitation-propaganda agents.

The enemy positioned in neighboring civilian houses still fired harassment fire on the defenders of the radio station whose ammunition stocks were running dangerously low. By mid morning each of the defenders only had an average of thirty rounds per man. The guard platoon leader, Master Sergeant Ngoc, sent one of his men out of the station to the logistics company compound to ask for ammo supplies. The man was caught halfway and killed by the enemy. One of the trapped civilian employees of the radio station, Mr Nguyen Dong, volunteered to do the risky job. He took a brief handwritten note from Sgt Ngoc to the logistics men and some two hours later, around noon, one truck managed to make its way into the partly besieged radio station with some 7,000 rounds. The defenders almost emptied their guns of the last rounds of ammo in order to provide fire cover for their buddies who were bringing the ammo in from the truck which was an enemy target at this time. The resupply really saved the station's guard platoon that night when the enemy attacked again to seize the station. The assault was thrown back without much difficulty.

The enemy force of about 21 men was almost wiped out at the province administrative headquarters compound, though it had succeeded in entering it. The province chief, LTC Khanh, and his family were at their residence, inside the compound during the entire night. The enemy apparently did not believe the province chief lived in so small a house well inside the compound. The enemy left the house untouched LTC Khanh took his wife and their four children into an indoor bunker where they stayed until he brought them out aboard an armored car around nine o'clock the following morning, Tet Day. After taking his wife and children to the bunker. LTC Khanh and his four soldier bodyguards swiftly manned the compound's only two armored personnel carriers. One of the two carriers could not move, its batteries were dead so it had to stay in place and strafe at the advancing enemy. The other carrier did an even more beautiful job and accounted for the larger part of the 17 enemy killed. The remaining four enemy chose to fight from inside the province administrative office

building. Unfortunately for the enemy none of them had any B40 rocket launchers to deal with the colonel's armored carriers. The carrier had a field day maneuvering up and down the compound. The colonel borrowed these two carriers from the 5th Logistics Command only a few days earlier in order to strengthen the defense of his headquarters.

At day break one element of the Mike Forces appeared at the frontgate of the compound. LTC Khanh moved out and briefed the American group commander on the situation and requested a ground assault against the four enemy diehards. The Americans called airstrikes in instead and the air action resulted in setting fire to the building. After getting his wife and children out of their bunkers LTC Khanh and his few men joined the friendly forces to counter-attack the enemy positions at the sector compound. This compound was across the road from the province administrative headquarters.

Around 0900h.one enemy reinforcement unit, the Company 2/7/18B also moved into town. It moved down Hoang Hoa Tham Street and attempted to occupy the multistoried building of the Social Welfare Service. The service chief Mr Phan Ngoc Tien, noticed the enemy coming and hurriedly closed all of building's steel doors and windows. Then he fired a pistol shot at the enemy. Strangely enough, the enemy failed to return fire and moved hurriedly to the adjoining Chieu Hoi Service and the private home of a former province chief, Luong Nhu Uy. From there the enemy opened fire on the American MP's headquarters on the opposite side of the street. The American and Korean troops returned fire and the gunfight cost the enemy 37 killed. Poor Mr Uy, who was trapped in his own house, was also killed. The remaining enemy troops moved down Trung Nu Vuong Street but were intercepted by a combined police and army ordnance force which killed six enemy in front of the Agricultural Affairs Service Office. The survivors of this enemy reinforcement column simply fled for their own lives fading into neighboring civilian houses and residential sections. The Airborne Rangers employed two M113 armored personnel carriers in their bid to destroy the last enemy holdouts. There were at least four of them inside the province administrative office building. The carriers were borrowed from the 5th Logistics Command but had no drivers. Some Airborne Rangers improvised as drivers. One of the carriers was mishandled, jumped backward instead of forward; and accidentally injured the deputy commander of the 91st SFA Battalion. Three of the four enemy were killed in one group which was sheltering itself under a table. The fourth died sitting on top of a chest of file drawers from which he had been firing at government troops. Moments later the

office building was set a fire in the unwanted airstrike called in by the US Mike Force.

Continuing to move the Airborne Rangers then assaulted the enemy positions in the sector compound and recaptured it around 1400h. They wiped out the entire enemy force except for one diehard who mysteriously fled under the cover of darkness. Before fleeing he wounded several government troops by sniping from a water tank towering over the sector command compound. Troops returned fire on him earlier in the afternoon but missed.

At 4 o'clock in the afternoon the government troops regained control of the entire Nha Trang city. Their ensuing actions were only sweep operations against enemy remnants hiding in civilian houses.

There was no fighting throughout the second day of Tet, Jan 31, until midnight. At this time the enemy regrouped his forces and staged desperate assault on the radio station and the Ngo Quyen Camp, which housed the Engineer Signal and Transportation units.

For the first time in the two-day-old Nha Trang battle American gunships (armed helicopters) entered the picture, providing close air support for the defenders. The fighting resulted in over 100 enemy bodies left behind and many weapons. Eleven defenders were killed and 57 wounded.

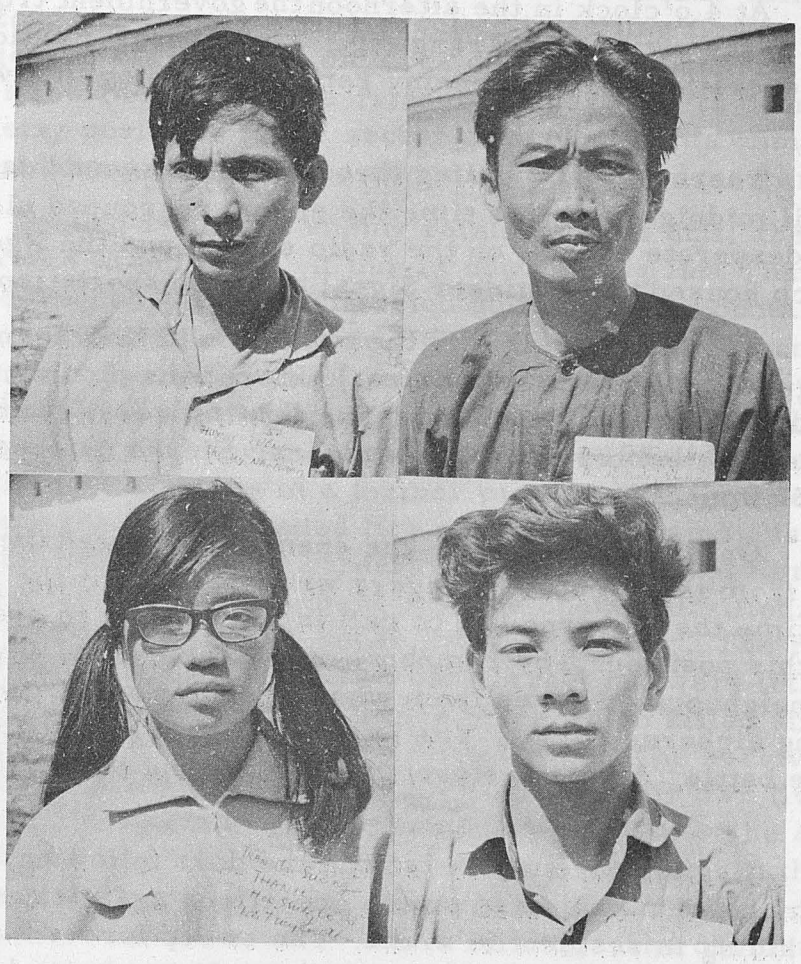
On the night of 31st, the enemy recaptured the Buddha Statue Hill from the Airborne Rangers who had taken it the preceding day. This time the airborne had to call in air support in order to recapture this position. The remnants of the enemy fled downhill and faded into neighboring houses from which they delivered cross fire on the pursuing airborne troops. The latter took heavy casualties at this stage of the battle. Airstrikes eventually wiped out the entire enemy force.

Begining from Feb 1st and the days following, the local command mounted coordinated sweep operations against enemy remnants still hiding in residential areas. The sweep forces included Vietnamese and allied troops. The sweep itself was extended to the suburbs and periphery of the city and as far out as the enemy's jungle base of Dong Bo.

Enemy remnants, for the most part were captured without offering any resistance to the sweep forces. Many of those who surren-



VC agents captured in Nhatrang



From left to right : 1. Huynh Tuong Commissar for Khanh Hoa and Deputy Party Secretary for Nhatrang, 2. Duong Tan Dat, 40, Military Commander with 17 years of party life, 3. Trang Thi Suong Thanh, 22, propaganda cadre, 4. Cao Tan Di alias Phong, 26, Chief sapper agent for Nhatrang.

dered were NVA soldiers who had gotten lost in the city's labyrinth of lanes, alleys and back alleys. Many disguised themselves as civilians. The sunburn traces that their autotire sandals had left on their feet betrayed them to the security men at check points. Nha Trang citizens played a major role as intelligence agents in helping government troops capture many of the enemy survivors. Six of these survivors, hiding in the house of a bread vendor were captured because of the information given the government troops by the vendor. Enemy bodies were left scattered around all the places which had come under enemy assault. Most of the bodies still carried a small plastic-covered sign "Determined To Win" around necks. The signs were written in long hand with blue ball pens. They looked very young and were between 16 and 20 years old. They wore assorted plain civilian clothes and uniforms. They also wore the familiar rubber sandals carved out of old autotires, called Ho Chi Minh sandals. This was the first time in the war that the people of Nha Trang had the opportunity to have a close look at a large number of enemy bodies. Many were shocked, saying the Communists employed children to fight the war. It was the first time also that they saw so many enemy captured in action. There were 77 of them, including 12 officers. Many of these enemy soldiers and agents had been captured thanks to the information provided by local civilians. Among the captured were Huynh Tuong, chief of the underground administration of Khanh Hoa province and concurrently deputy secretary to the VC chief of Nha Trang; Junior Captain Duong Tan Đat, Nha Trang city commander; Junior Captain Huynh Ngo, deputy chief of Khanh Hoa Military proselyting section; Lt Le Trong Cach, Khanh-Hoa guerrilla Training section's deputy chief; and Huynh Chieu, Khanh Hoa guerrilla force commander. Most of the other prisoners had been members of the enemy companies 1/7/18B and 2/7/18B and Sapper Company K90. Confessions by the major prisoners led to the elimination of many city-based enemy secret cells between Jan 30 and Feb 20. Fifty three such secret agents were arrested. Among those arrested were Cao Van Bi alias Phong in charge of in-town sapper operations; Nguyen Van To alias Quyet in charge of forming underground cells; and Dang Oanh in charge of supervising subversive actions. All three held the rank of Nha Trang city council members. Many of the others had charge of supplies logistics, intelligence, espionage, terrorism and so on. There were also four students who were in charge of spreading propaganda.

The city-based enemy infrastructure was thus virtually eliminated. It would take him a long time to build up another underground

operation net work. He may never be able to do so.

C. IN THE WAKE OF THE OFFENSIVE.

The offensive brought about a lot of changes to the outward appearances of Nha Trang city. To some extent the frame of mind and thinking of the citizens also underwent drastic changes. The city ceased to be a place for fun. Fun seekers became a rare sight in the area. The city assumed the grim look of austerity and determination.

Bunkers, trenches and other types of combat positions were built all over the city. They were built at strategic street intersections and at the foot of lampposts. More sandbagged bunkers, barbed wire fences and mobile roadblocks were set up around military and administrative installations. Checkpoints manned by police, troops and popular militia were busy checking papers of passersby and travellers. An aggressive and offensive spirit was very much in evidence. Combat ready troops and police were seen almost everywhere in town and suburbs. Patrols and brief home searches were frequent occurrences in many areas of the city.

Public servants, civilian cadres and just plain citizens were organized into groups. The people's self-defense force (PSDF) was strengthened by bringing together all civilians not associated with the regular defense agencies. This force, numbering over 1,000 men, was given brief training in weapon and security matters. Membership included men up to the age of 45 years. Forty per cent of the members were given weapons which they rotated with the remaining sixty per cent. Their public appearance was made in a ceremony on Feb 23, 1968 at which 22 officers, noncoms and troopers and policemen who had distinguished themselves in action during the enemy's offensive were decorated.

In addition the people, like those in many other cities and towns, engaged in a feverish campaign of sandbag shelter building. This activity caused the prices of sand bags and labor to go upwards. The people were also given sufficient instruction on how to behave in case the enemy assaulted the city again. Therefore when they hear shouts of people or see the police hunting a Viet Cong agent down their street they shut their doors and windows. They do this to prevent the enemy from invading their homes rather than out of panic. The curfew was scrupulously observed. For several weeks after the end of the offensive streets became almost deserted shortly after dark.

Other consequenses of the Tet fighting were really sad. Over 3, 500 persons or some 600 families were made homeless, many of them penniless. These people were former residents of the areas of Vuon Uom, Xom Con, Dong Nai, Lu Gia, the railroad station, the radio station and the army stockade. These areas were made a shambles by the action of both friend and foe. The homeless were temporarily housed in public buildings such as government offices, schools, pagodas and churches - any structures that were spared by the fighting. These public buildings were turned into refugee centers. There were seven of them. These were not enough to house all the unfortunate people. Many people had to live under makeshift tents which were an assembly of any material ranging from half-burned pieces of wood boards, iron roofing, worn out ponchos given by soldiers or traded in the blackmarket, to anything that could possibly protect them from sunshine. These makeshift shelters made the courtyards of schools, churches and pagodas look like stone-age tribal hamlets. It was generally a pitiful sight. As a matter of fact, however, none of the refugees were starved or died of starvation as food and other supplies were provided regularly. Epidemics and deadly diseases were the threats hanging over the heads of the people.

Each refugee family received from government welfare agencies and private charities somewhere between 500and 3,000 piastres in cash relief plus other emergency supplies. Vietnamese and foreign physicians made daily visits and provided medical care and medicine to the sick and weak. Information workers regularly showed movies at night and gave out reading materials. In the meantime the government distributed cement and iron roofing to victim families to help them rebuild their homes in areas where they had lived before.

Nearly 200 families in the nursery area were given similar help to rebuild their houses. They had been squatters in this government owned area. Because they were the hardest-hit people in the city, the local government finally decided to give a plot of land to each family. In addition the government gave cement, iron roofing and highly specialized services such as ground levelling and rubble clearing with bulldozers. These people for the first time in their life, became owners of their homes and lands.These homes were generally better than their former homes.These gifts freed them from the fear of being forced to move somewhere else at some future date.

Victims in other areas also benefited from this relief. This relief program encouraged them to complete reconstruction of

their houses on or even before schedule. The people's virtue of traditional hard-work and moral endurance added to this achievement and saved the local administration some difficulties and troubles.

D. LESSONS LEARNED.

The greatest advantages enjoyed by the enemy before and during the offensive were derived from the long Tet truce and the lifting of the curfew on Tet's Eve. These actions resulted in a lack of vigilance among outpost garrisong, checkpoint security men and the fun-loving populace. This state of affairs led to sharp drops in the inflow of intelligence reports. The enemy took advantage of all these things to secretly move his combat troops, sapper and political agents into the city to launch the surprise raids on military and government agencies. This allowed them to inflict heavy casualties upon some nonvigilant garrisons and to take over populated areas almost without firing a shot. The reduced garrison strength, resulting from excessive Tet home leaves which were granted by commanding officers, also accounted for the enemy successes in the early hours of the offensive and for the inability of the defenders to conduct the counter attacks. Combat weary troops just back from the battle fields for a rest were ordered to launch counterattacks which challenged their depleted strength.

The enemy also made enough serious mistakes to make their offensive a miserable flop. First, he was so openly confident in his victory that he underestimated the defenders' will and ability to react and defeat him. Second, overestimated his popular support to such a degree that he thought he could hold the socalled anti-government mass rallies in town. Third, he assumed the Khanh Hoa sector command to be the only nerve center of the province. Consequently he believed that its seizure would immediately demoralize the other governmental army units into surrendering or defecting. Fourth; many of the enemy field commanders doubted the feasibility of the offensive plan and therefore there was a serious lack of coordination among enemy assault units.

The fourth point was verified by the testimony of all twelve enemy officers captured, including Huynh Tuong, Nha Trang (enemy) deputy political commissar and Khanh Hoa political commissar. This 40-year-old, frailly built Communist commander told his captors and reporter Hong Duong that he had never believed that takeover of Nha Trang City was possible with the modest assault force of

800 men. This was his impression when he was first informed of the assault plan some three months earlier. He said the offensive schedule was still vague in early January 1968 or roughly a month before the offensive actually was to take place. Then he attended an offensive plan discussion in the Dong Bo war base where his superiors told him to regard the rural and urban assault tasks as equal, meaning that his troops must assault the cities and the countryside at the same time. One the 20th of January, ten days before the actual offensive, a zonal commissar identified as Lam came to the war base and revealed the offensive scheme. He said the plan must be carried out simultaneously with larger forces to be committed to assaults on towns and cities. The plan was discussed in minute detail for three consecutive days ending Jan 24, or six days before the actual offensive. Tuong said most if not all of those military commanders and political chiefs present worried about the high risks of such an action, even though it was timed to coincide with the Tet truce. Several of the leaders, Tuong included, questioned Zonal Commissar Lam about the wisdom and feasibility of the plan. The commissar's answers were promises of troop reinforcements from other provincial guerrilla units, namely a rocket company and the B/18B and 9th Battalions. These never showed up at any stage of the offensive. Lam also told his men that American troops were fully committed in the Khe Sanh - A Shau Valley operations and so on. Pressed to commit himself even more clearly on his promises of additional manpower, Lam quoted Mao Tse Tung's sayings to hush them up, and for the purpose of injecting some belief in a full victory. Another topic of Lam's presentation was an outline of what he called the (Hanoi's Communist) Party's "Second Front" theory. According to this theory the NLF should cease to be a political instrument in favor of another organization, the Alliance for Democracy and Peace and confine its activities to military field only. This piece of sophistry perplexed most of the leading political and military cadremen present. This news dumbfounded them but they had received an order and there could be no further questioning it, Tuong added.

The enemy's attack plan against Nha Trang contained several more shortcomings. The fifth point was the general ignorance of the geography of the city and its maze of alleys and lanes by the assault unit leaders. This caused many enemy to elect holding out to die rather than withdrawing. Others were eventually either lost or captured. The sixth shortcoming of the enemy was his poor intelligence about the actual size of several garrisons. This caused him not to attack several lightly guarded installations, such as the radio station.

It also caused failure to exploit the factor of surprise at other points. These failures gave the defenders plenty of time to mount their counter-attacks.

The defenders despite several major mistakes, enjoyed several advantages. First, all units were operating under one command. This precluded faulty coordination of the counter attacks and waste of manpower. The reestablishment of control over the situation in roughly twelve hours can best be attributed to the clocklike precision of most of these operations. The second advantage was the presence of the 91st Airborne Ranger Battalion, which had recently returned for a rest and recuperation tour in town. The high mobility of the Special Forces units involved was also an advantage.

These Special Forces Battalions which had been positioned out of the city during the Tet truce were called in to rescue the embattled city. They were ordered to move back to their home base and reacted swiftly.

The third advantage of the defenders resulted from the excellent handling of the prisoners of war, most of whom were war-wearied and dissillusioned. The prisoners gave valuable information which led to the capture of important Commnunist agents based in the city and to the destruction of their cells. It may take the enemy several months or even years to build up another operational secret infrastructure inside Nha Trang. He may never be able to do so.

The fourth advantage enjoyed by government troops was the aloof attitude of the people toward enemy calls for mass demonstrations and riots as well as their high sense of discipline during the counter attacks by the defenders.

The fifth significant point was the high fighting morale of some of the defensive units such as the 20 guards at the radio station and the counter attacking forces.

Qui Nhon

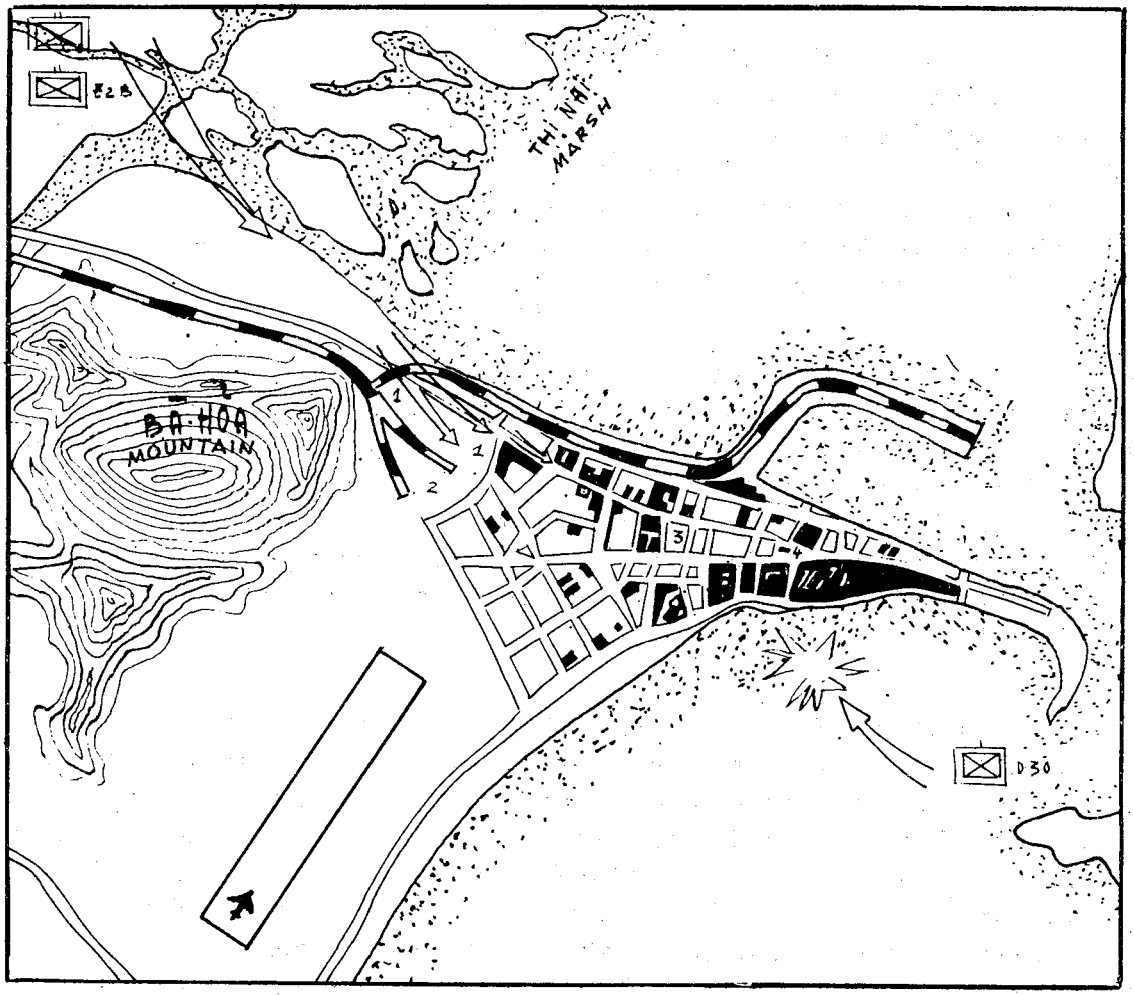
Since colonial days Qui Nhon city has been the main gate for the supply of seaborne commodities for a large portion of the Central Vietnam highlands. The expansion of its port facilities and the completion of the repair works on Highway 19 have established the vital economic and strategic importance of the city even more clearly. This highway links Qui Nhon to Pleiku and leads to Kontum in the North and Banmethuot in the South.

The enemy as early as 1965, attempted to take over the city or at least make it the country's worst troublespot. He failed miserably in the face of the determined pacification drives by the Allied and local forces stationed there. In early 1967 Qui Nhon became one of the calmest places in the country. Civilian life returned to normal even in the rural areas several miles around the city. Towns people, working for Allied and Vietnamese government agencies, were better off than at any other time.

In the face of the overwhelming superiority of the friendly forces the 18th Viet Cong Regiment had to break up into small units and melt away into remote rural areas. The Regiment avoided all major engagements. The enemy tried to fight a major battle in Qui Nhon proper within the framework of his general offensive plan, in order to deflate the popular myth concerning its invulnerability. He committed a meager assault force of less than battalion size - some 200 men - to the battle. This battle could only be regarded as a token contribution to his highly - publicized countrywide general offensive.

A. THE QUI NHON BATTLE

The enemy wanted very much to capitalize on the element of surprise in the conduct of his assault. The assault, however had been anticipated by the friendly forces who had gotten prepared for a counter-attack. Factors unknown to friendly forces, however, were exact knowledge of when and how the enemy would unleash their ground assault. Lt. Col Phan Minh Tho, chief of Binh Đinh Province, sent out loudspeaker trucks to roam throughout the city on the afternoon of Tet's Eve, to inform the people that firecrackers were banned. This was a counter-



VC ATTACK IN QUI-NHON

LEGEND :

→ Enemy advance
1.- Huyen-Tran Hamlet.
2.- Railways station.
3.- Radio station.
4.- Government house.

order which contradicted central governmental decision to allow the people all over the country to enjoy this tradition of the celebration - exploding firecrackers to greet the big holiday. Most people had already bought firecrackers for the celebration. Many people complied with the surprise order; others did not and set off firecrackers stealthily.

The order was motivated by intelligence reports about an imminent enemy attack on the city. The reports were based on statements by a leading local Viet Cong cadreman and on the strange-sounding pronouncements of two captured audio tapes. The Viet Cong agent was identified as Nguyen Phung Khuon alias Bien Cuong, provincial commissar in charge of the Qui Nhon underground administration. He and ten of his close aides were captured in town.

The province chief also imposed an unusually long curfew on the city adjoining areas and placed all the local security forces - police and soldiers - on a full alert footing.

Col Tho reported the above information to his superior officers, II Corps Commander Gen. Vinh Loc and 22nd Infantry Division Commander Gen.Nguyen Van Hieu. Lt Col Le Van Than . the ARVN Joint General Staff Operation Center Director, was also notified of the content of the strange audio tapes when Col Tho played them for him over the radio telephone.

Right after initial intelligence reports reached the Army Security Service concerning enemy agents in the suburban Bach Dang hamlet. The Binh Dinh Sector Command conducted a successful raid on the enemy hideout. Second Lt Le Xuan Vinh led ten men, all disguised as civilians, in the raid. They quickly and quietly cordoned the suspected location. Then they jumped on the enemy from the roof of a house and found three men and one woman working on a tape recorder. Caught by surprise the four tried to resist and flee. They were too late. Their two pistols were taken by the government agents along with the tape recorder and two tapes. They never had a chance to fire their guns. A quick interrogation of the captives caused the government agents to storm a nearby house where five male and two female Viet Cong were captured and tied up before they could fire any shots. Altogether, eleven enemy agents were arrested in the raid.

Initial interrogation of a few of the captives revealed that the enemy would probably take advantage of the Tet holiday to assault Qui Nhon and other towns and cities across the land. Four of the eleven arrested refused to disclose anything substantial about the



The Radio Station in Qui Nhon city, which enemy troops occupied for over 12 hours.



An armed propaganda team in action in the street of Qui Nhon



LTC Phan Minh Tho, Binh Dinh Governor congratulating the deserving combatants.



National Salvation Youths



Civil servants were given weapons to become civil guards.

plot. The 22nd Army Security Zone chief, Capt. Nguyen Van Quyen, spent a whole day conducting the interrogation, which failed to turn up the detail of the enemy's scheme of assault. By midnight the captain and all of his men were too tired to continue the interrogation further. Time was running out for the local commanders.

It was all quiet in town as if nothing were to happen. The people religiously obverved both the big holiday and the curfew.

Gunfire suddenly commenced around 0410 h. on Tet Day or Jan 30. It started right in the middle of the city just outside the Army Security Service building there the eleven enemy who had been captured several hours earlier were being detained. Apparently the enemy sought to liberate these men and women before launching the city-wide offensive.

After overpowering the few guards at the Army Security Service compound, the enemy started the full scale assault on the city. They commenced with an attack on Qui Nhon radio station and the adjoining areas. Only a few dozen enemy sappers were committed to this action. Apparently, they still adhered to their original offensive plan to take over the radio station and use it to broadcast their ready-made tapes in order to fool the local citizens into joining a popular uprising against the local government and army garrison. The fact that the sappers tried their best to hold out at the radio station proved this point. They fought in ferocious manner only to be wiped out. At no stage of their occupation of the radio station were they able to broadcast any official statements or appeals for a popular uprising.

The entire enemy force committed to the Qui Nhon offensive was estimated at two understrength battalions. The commanders of these battalions may have been reluctant to launch the assault. Qui Nhon was a major Vietnamese and allied base with major troop concentrations and militay installations, Apparently the enemy sought to seize and control it for a few days for propaganda purposes or to make a contribution of sorts to the Viet Cong High Command's general offensive throughout the Republic. Within this context the Qui Nhon offensive may be judged as a calculated act of suicide for the two unlucky battalions committed. One of these two battalions, identified as E2B, had only 100 or fewer men. The same was true of the sapper battalion which bore the brunt of the assault and took most of the casualties.

These two battalions had infiltrated through the northwestern side of the city from the Thi Nai lake areas. During the infiltration they split two columns. One column led by the sapper reconnaissance battalion broke into the middle of the city. Here an armed underground suicide unit disguised as soldiers of the 22nd Infantry Division had safely infiltrated several days previously. The main objective of all these enemy forces was to attack and occupy the radio station and then to call for a popular uprising. A secondary enemy force, spearheaded by the sapper company D30, tried to land just behind the provincial administrative headquarters and sector command compound in stolen civilian junks and sampans. Most of their landing craft were sunk by American patrol boats.

The two columns of the enemy force spearheaded by the E2B battalion, moved from the Thi Nai lake, overran the suburban Huyen Tran hamlet and occupied the Qui Nhon railroad station. From the railroad station enemy troops moved in small groups into adjoining populated areas. They urged the people to rise up against the government. Their ambitious plan failed because the people refused to join any propaganda rallies or demonstrations organized by the enemy. Angered, the enemy resorted to terrorization of the people. He murdered and wounded a number of innocent civilians and he destroyed a number of the public installations in the area. A detailed account of the action follows.

The enemy surprise attack on the Army Security Service compound was first detected by Sergeant Thu who fired the first bursts of submachinegun fire at the advancing enemy but was killed by the numerically superior force. Sgt Thu's death allowed the enemy ready access to the compound where Capt Quyen, dog-tired after a hectic day which included the raid, capture and interrogation of the eleven enemy agents, was caught napping. He was captured and led away and has not been heard of since. Four of the 12 men who were with Capt Quyen died resisting the enemy. Eight were wounded. A number of men managed to escape unhurt.

Normally the compound was guarded by a detail of combat soldiers contributed by various armed services on a daily basis. For reasons unknown, that guard detail was not formed at the compound that day. Some people blamed Lt Col Tuy deputy sector commander, for the failure. Others said that the failure was due to the fact that a good number of garrison soldiers had been excused from duty to celebrate Tet at home. Official sources never confirmed or

denied these and other allegations.

While enemy troops stormed the Army Security and adjacent compounds a group of guerrillas, disguised as soldiers of the 22nd Infantry Division made their way into the city's military command compound which was located in the same general area. They were detected by the guards. The guards opened fire supported by two armored vehicles positioned on Vo Tanh street. The armored vehicles were positioned to increase the security of the radio station. After having cut down several waves of the enemy assault force they were later crippled by enemy B40 rockets. The enemy finally attacked the station and the nearby information service building and subsidiary installations. His swift assault on these and other points in the city was made possible partly by the faulty appraisal of enemy capabilities. Our troops were given reinforcements but were not vigilant enough. The radio station was occupied by the enemy. Among the occupants was Bien-Cuong, who had been one of the agents captured the day before and detained at the security headquarters. He wanted to broadcast propaganda but failed because the lost audio tapes which had to be used were never recaptured by the guerrillas. The radio station battle was the most serious defeat for the friendly force in Qui Nhon during the offensive Nine guards were killed and thirty wounded and missing. Thirty weapons and a PRC. 10 radio were lost. The enemy redistributed these captured weapons to some pro-Communist civilians in order to start the planned popular uprising which never materialized. In the afternoon of Tet Day four American soldiers inadvertently passed by the Red-held radio station. Three of them were killed and the fourth wounded.

The Binh Dinh sector command regrouped all the existing and available organic manpower and fire power to cope with the increasingly critical situation. The only thing available was one Regional force assault company supported by four APC's, the latter had just been sent in by the 22nd Tactical Zone Command.

The zone commander, Gen. Nguyen Van Hieu, later sent in the 405th Reconnaissance Company. This unit was engaged by the enemy at Long Van Hamlet and never reached the town. A company of the 12th Engineer Battalion and a platoon of the B. 11 Special Forces Command were also dispatched to aid the city. They reached the radio station at 0800h. but could not drive the enemy out of their sandbagged positions inside the radio station.

The Korean "Tiger" Division, headquartered some 10kms from the city, was then requested to assist. Two Korean companies

were rushed to the radio station area around 1600h. Two hours later 1/4 Battalion of the 22nd Infantry Division arrived to relieve enemy pressure from the Huyen Tran Hamlet as two Special Forces companies from the B. 11 Command were helilifted into town to recapture the railroad station.

The operation was slowed down by the fact that too many civilians were trapped inside the enemy-held areas. Friendly forces did not want their counterattacks to become too destructive for these innocent people. Loudspeaker trucks were sent out to tell the people to try to get out of the operational areas and also to tell the enemy to surrender.

Night fell on the city but friendly troops still were not given approval to start shooting. All the enemy held areas were cordoned while the loudspeaker trucks continued continuous broadcasting. Around midnight loudspeaker planes and choppers started to fly over enemy positions calling on enemy troops to surrender. This psywar operation lasted all night till the morning of the second day of Tet or Jan 31.

The enemy only fired occasionally. The round-the-clock curfew was still in force. The curious crowds thronged to Vo Tanh street for a glimpse of the imminent confrontation at the radio station.

About 0800h.reports reached the city that a Communist-led popular demonstration was moving into the city from Tuy Phuoc district, some 12kms away. Two fire engines and a loudspeaker truck were sent out to disperse the marchers. Before these vehicles contacted the demonstration it had been broken up by soldiers of the 405th Recon Company, who had been stopped by an enemy blocking force the day before.

Shortly after mid-morning, the Koreans opened fire on the multi-storied radio station. Smoke billowed skyward from this building and apparently blinded the stubborn defenders. The Korean troops began to assault the building and the adjoining information office Around 1030 hours a 30 man police detail led by Maj Hai was sent in to help the Koreans separate the trapped civilians from the captured enemy survivors. After assaulting the building the Koreans took another six hours to finish the last of the enemy. The enemy held out and engaged in room-to-room fighting which did not end until about 1600h. The Korean assault ended the enemy's 12-hour control of the radio station. The entire enemy force was knocked out of action suffering

24 killed, 12 wounded and captured and the lost of 25 weapons including two crew served weapons. Bien Cuong and an enemy battalion commander were among the enemy killed. The radio station was almost completely destroyed and was not heard until an emergency transmitter, loaned by JUSPAO and manned by Binh Dinh sector technical personnel, allowed it to go on the air that night.

The liberation of the suburban Huyen Tran Hamlet was also completed the same day. The hamlet is located at the foot of Ba Hoa mountain just on the western outskirts on the city. Let's now examine the events leading up to its liberation. The enemy seized Huyen Tran Hamlet on Jan 30. Right after overrunning it he sent small groups of armed recon troops farther out toward the heart of the city. These troops went down Gia Long Street (the city's main street) and toward the harbor. Many of these groups were either repulsed or wiped out. Others tried to fade back into other populated areas. A few of the enemy tried unsuccessfully to occupy a multi storied building overlooking the Nguyen Hue park. Others succeeded in setting fire to the Caltex filling station on Dong Da street. They murdered its owner, Nguyen Phuoc Te. In the Ly Thuong Kiet Hamlet they killed three civilians. In Nguyen Cong Hamlet they gunned down five others, including the 60-year-old Khong Mieu. Four enemy, who entered the city's main bus station, were captured trying to hide in a nearby drainage duct. Local citizens had led government troops to their hiding place. The enemy was captured and surrendered three weapons.

In the almost unopposed liberation of Huyen Tran Hamlet. The 1/41 Battalion moved up Gia Long and Dong Da streets. In a brief encounter a few blocks short of the hamlet four enemy were killed and a few grenades captured. The estimated enemy platoon, which controlled the hamlet, had withdrawn to the railroad station where they were pinned down by the concentrated fire power of the CIDG Forces positioned atop Mrs Nguyen Thi De's building. The enemy pulled back into the station's workshop and three abandoned boxcars from where they fought back. A few enemy fled across the Ba Hoa mountain where they were chased uphill and fired at in the presence of crowds of curious civilians, who trailed behing the pursuing government troops. The enemy force holed up in the station's workshop and boxcars was wiped out by 1630 hours. 14 were killed, 10 wounded captured and four weapons were seized. Friendly troops lost four killed and seven wounded. The workshop was a total loss. Its equipment which included one crane, one lathe and four diesel engines, was seriously damaged. Most if not all of its portable tools had been looted.

The 1/41 Battalion started a systematic sweep of the Huyen Tran Hamlet for possible enemy survivors before sun down. The sweep continued till 1230 h. the following day. At this time the battalion left the area to return to the 22nd Infantry Division headquarters.

The Binh Dinh province chief called a mass rally soon after the recapture of the radio station. Some 2,000 citizens attended the rally to condemn the enemy truce violation and act of betrayal. The objectives of the rally were to calm down popular emotions over the enemy actions and to restore public order.

Some of the surviving enemy, however, were still hiding inside the city that night and taking potshots at the Ham Nghi street police station. One of them was cornered inside the post office and was captured several hours later.

In the following days the police sweep and screening of civilians resulted in the capture of several enemy and weapons. The following are the results of the day-to-day searches and sweeps :

-On the third day of Tet, Korean troops searched the radio station and killed four enemy, seized three weapons and captured one enemy Lieutenant; 1/41 Battalion captured two enemy and one grenade in Huyen Tran Hamlet; troops and police killed four enemy and seized five AK's and rifles, and one pistol, which the enemy had thrown into the well of Lt Col Tuy's house. Earlier in the day the enemy had opened sniper fire from this house wounding one American lieutenant and two CIDG men.

-On the fourth day of Tet the sector troops captured four enemy, the 405th Recon Company killed one and seized one weapon, the Special Forces captured four enemy and seized three weapons, and a sector garrison platoon found 18 enemy weapons hidden in town.

-On the fifth day of Tet, four enemy were captured and one enemy pistol was seized, including one enemy with the pistol captured by local citizens. One American MP was wounded by enemy sniper fire that day.

The sweep continued throughout the following days and resulted in the capture of a few enemy hidding in populated areas. By the fifth day of Tet, or Feb 3, the city was slowly returning to normal. Shops were opened and the city market was in business. The city's power and water supply system continued to work normally throughout

the fighting except for these combat areas where power lines and water mains were torn down or disrupted by the fighting.

The total results of the enemy's Tet offensive in Qui-Nhon city were as follows. :

Enemy : 110 killed, including provincial commissar Bien Cuong and a battalion commander; 57 captured including Lieutenant Nguyen, political commissar of the enemy sapper battalion, and 129 weapons seized, including nine crew served weapons. Those captured also included a number of suspects and pro-Communist agents.

Friendly : 17 killed, including three American officers and four enlisted men; 64 wounded and 38 weapons lost, including two crew served weapons.

Public property damage included the Information Office, the radio station, the Army Security Service compound, two police jeeps, two armored vehicles two military trucks and the virtual destruction of the railroad station's workshop.

Civilian property damage included moderate damage to 110 houses in Huyen Tran Hamlet, nine in Nguyen Cong Tru Hamlet and 46 in Bach Dang Hamlet. Civilian casualties throughout the Binh Dinh province were 129 killed and 116 wounded. About half of these civilian casualties were from Qui Nhon city.

The offensive caused a total of 16,016 refugees to be displaced from their homes and villages into safer government-controlled areas.

B. ENEMY OFFENSIVE ON DISTRICT TOWNS

Besides Qui Nhon city a number of district towns such as An Nhon and Tuy Phuoc were assaulted by the enemy.

An estimated enemy company attempted to assault An Nhon on the morning of Feb 2 or the fourth day of Tet. They suffered sixty killed and lost eleven weapons, including one anti-aircraft machinegun. This result was obtained by the district's newly reinforced militia garrison, supported by airstrikes. Most of the enemy casualties were credited to airstrikes.

In Loc Ha Hamlet, just outside Tuy Phuoc district town, a Regional Force unit engaged the enemy and killed 45 of them and seized eight assorted weapons.

Phan Thiet

Phan Thiet city, located on the shore of the sea and about 170kms ENE of Saigon, is divided into two sections by the Muong Man or Ca Ty river. The residential and business section is on the right or southern bank. The administrative section is on the left or northeastern bank. The city sits astride the river's estuary. Northern portion of the river can be forded at ebb tide. The two sections of the city are linked to each other by a steel bridge. The sections have a combined population of about 50,000 inhabitants living in seven hamlets - four on the southern left bank of the Muong Man river and three on the northern right bank. The right bank hamlets are Duc Nghia, Duc Thang, Duc Long and Lac Dao. The three left bank hamlets are Phu Trinh, Binh Hung and Vinh Phu.

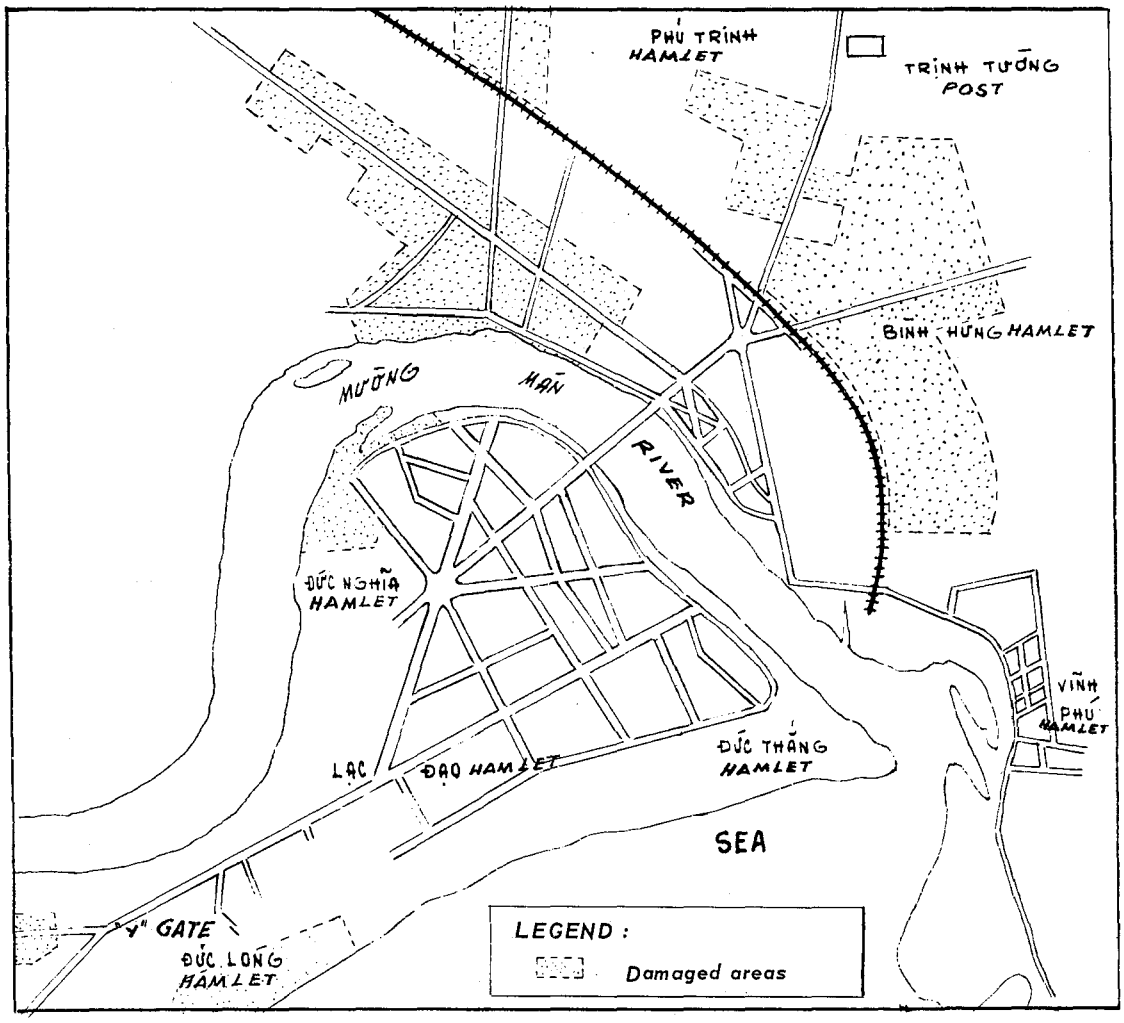
Three kms west of the city is the airfield where a US Air Force unit was stationed. The airfield also included helipads. On the northwestern side of the city is a vast wild expanse of white sand easy for the enemy to infiltrate. The southern side borders on the sea and is a busy fishing and fish sauce manufacturing area.

The city people are predominently hard workers who make a living out of fishing, fish sauce manufacturing and small businesses. Generally they are not interested in politics or politically-oriented. This explains why enemy agents had always been unable to secure any firm political foothold in the city proper. Against this background one can conclude that the enemy's 1968 Tet offensive was launched from outside bases many miles away.

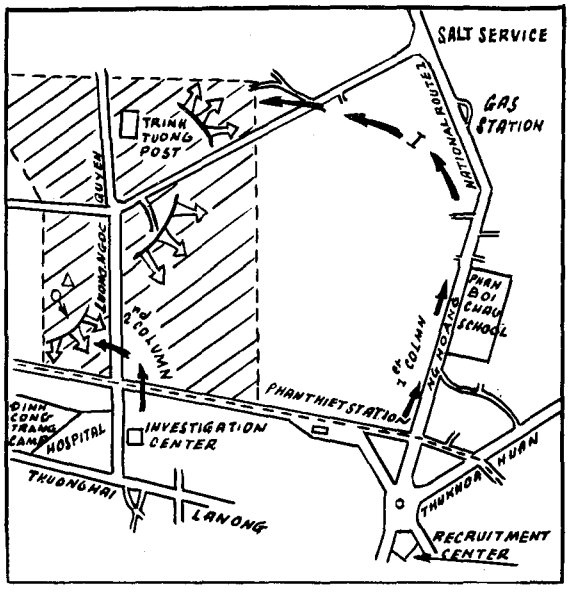
A. THE PHAN THIET OFFENSIVE.

In a period of slightly over one month the city was subjected to four distinct ground assaults during the 1968 Tet offensive. The first assault lasted the first seven days of Tet or from Jan 30 through Feb 5. The second one lasted From Feb 17 through Feb 20; the third one from Feb 25 through Feb 26 and the fourth one only one day, Mar 12.

The first assault started around 0325 h. on Jan 31. The enemy simultaneously attacked the airfield, key area 44 between Dinh



PHAN-THIET CITY



THE ATTACK ON TRINH TUONG CAMP

LEGEND

: POPULOUS AREA OCCUPIED BY ENEMY
: ALLIED TROOP ADVANCE
: ENEMY TROOP MOVEMENT
△ : VC HEAVY WEAPONS

Cong Trang and Cao-Thang camps and the Trinh Tuong Camp on Luong Ngoc Quyen Road, which was about one kilometer from the provincial administrative headquarters.

The enemy unit committed to the assault was the 482nd VC Battalion, This was a main-force VC unit with a strength of about 300 men which had been operating in Binh Thuan for a long time.

The enemy force moved in two columns. One column included Companies C1 and C2 supported by a heavy weapon had the mission of assaulting the Trinh Tuong Camp. The other column which included Company C3 was to attack the Phu Khanh Hamlet.

The Trinh Tuong Camp was defended by a platoon of the Artillery Battalion 23B and elements of the 954th Regional Force Company. There were a total of about 50 men. The camp was the home base of the 44th Infantry Regiment whose main force was operating in the field. Following a long pre-Tet operation in the province most of the 954th RF Compny troops were allowed a Tet home leave.

Though outnumbered and outgunned the defenders managed to turn back all of the enemy's assault waves. At daylight, nearly 20 enemy bodies were found in the area. The enemy's heavy weapons had been used to soften up the camp prior to the actual ground assault. Throughout the night of Jan 30 they also directed diversionary mortar and cannon fire at the Dinh Cong Trang Camp.

Enemy troops still surrounded the Trĩnh Tuong Camp. On the morning of the second day of Tet or Jan 31, Maj Tran Van Cha, deputy province chief, led two understrength RF companies, the 208th, and 954th, to relieve enemy pressures from the beleaguered camp. Many of the 150 man force had hurriedly returned from their Tet home leave. These units moved up Nguyen Hoang Road maneuvering behind the camp and engaged the enemy who was equipped with new AK's and B40 rocket launchers. The relief column tried unsuccessfully to move further but had to fight a delaying battle waiting for reinforcements.

Lt Col Nguyen Khac Tuan, province chief, led another combat unit up Luong Ngoc Quyen Road and directly hit enemy lines facing the camp. This unit was later commanded by Lt Lu Tay Tuu, Binh Thuan subsector intelligence officer. The unit had only 48 men, all seasoned soldiers.

The group moved up in two military trucks. As it reached the Interrogation Center it received a round of B40 rocket fire which missed the target. The attackers, equipped with captured enemy AK automatic rifles, left the trucks and maneuvered against the right flank of the enemy line firing their weapons. The characteristic sound of the group's AK's confused the enemy so badly that he did not return fire. He allowed the group to move deep into his position and then between his position and the beleaguered camp. Lt Thu radioed Maj Cha requesting an assault against the enemy's heavy weapon unit. The major conducted a ferocious and accurate assault supported by machineguns mounted on commando cars. The attack destroyed virtually the entire enemy heavy weapon unit. This action cost the enemy one 82mm mortar, one machinegun, two light machineguns, one B40 rocket launcher and nine rifles. In addition the deputy commander of the 482th VC Battalion was killed and two company leaders, two platoon leaders and eight guerrillas were captured.

The enemy troops losing their top leaders, were demoralized and pulled back in the face of the fast advancing relief column. Thus the siege around the Trinh Tuong Camp was broken around 1000h.

The enemy spread into the adjoining Cho Go area after failing to take the camp. Here he was bombed by jet fighters in the afternoon. Government troops fought hard but still failed to dislodge the enemy from this populated area. As night fell the 208th RF Company was left behind to strengthen the camp's garrison and to block enemy access to other neighboring areas. Meanwhile civilian refugees streamed across the city's only bridge to reach the quiet southwestern side of the city.

The enemy company C2 faded into the populated Cho Go area following their defeat at the Trinh Tuong Camp. The other enemy elements pulled back to the sandy northwestern side of the city.

Their route of withdrawal had been blocked by two platoons, one from the 506th US Task Force and the other 101st US Airborne Division. They were helilifted into the area around 1600 h. These American units engaged the enemy 7kms northwest of downtown Phan Thiet and killed another 30 men of retreating Company C1.

On the second night of Tet, Jan 31 calm returned to the whole city. Airdropped flares still served as a grim reminder to the people of the city that the war was still very much on.



Phu Trinh hamlet afire.



A market at Phu Trinh hamlet following the 2nd wave of Communist attacks.



Giac Hoa Pagoda



The local Cathedral

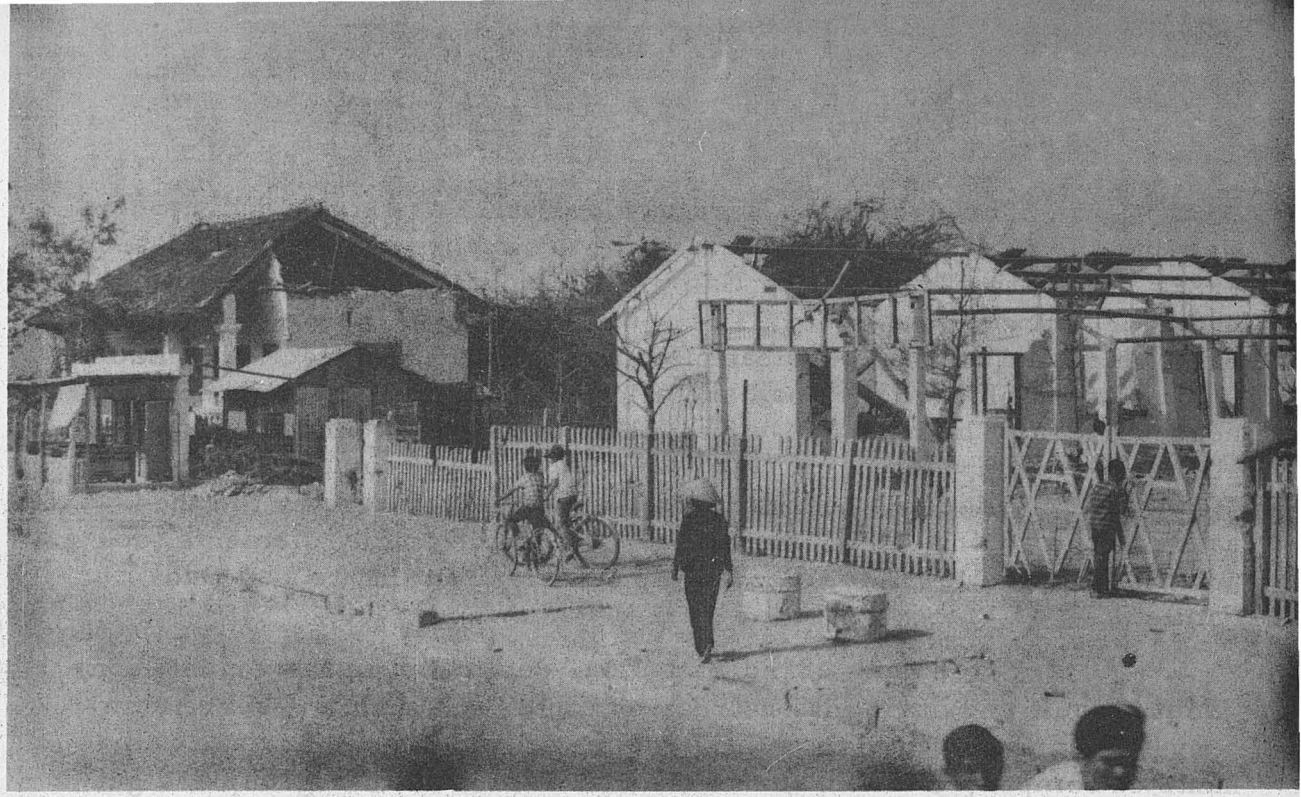
Throughout the third day of Tet, Feb 1st, friendly troops were unable to dislodge the remnants of the enemy from the populated areas around the Trinh Tuong Camp. The morale of the understrength 208th RF Company was poor, The same was true of the 954th RF Company which had only one combat platoon. Only a machinegun-mounted truck platoon blocked the road and alleys leading to the sector command headquarters. The hard hit - one killed and seven wounded - recon platoon was overworked and tried and unable to fight much longer, Meanwhile civilian refugees streamed across the bridge by the thousands to the southwestern side of the city. Some enemy elements took advantage of the low tide to cross the river and infiltrate Lac Dao Hamlet.

The enemy 482nd Battalion, decimated in the Trinh Tuong camp assault and during its retreating route, still had a reserve company, C4, uncommitted to any fighting at all. This company and remnants of company C3 withdrew to the Dai Nam area to regroup and get replacements, equipment and supplies. Reinforced by the 481st Sapper Company, the 485th Artillery Company, the 430th Regional Guerrilla Company and a number of support elements, the enemy 482nd Battalion returned to the city for another massive assault.

The battalion objectives were the same as those in the initial assault plus the province sector command complex.

Intelligence reports later revealed that another enemy battalion was moving toward the city. This was the 480th Viet Cong Battalion from the Le Hong Phong Jungle War Zone. The 480th battalion first appeared in Binh Thuan province in early 1967. It was staffed predominently by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops and numbered about 250 men plus the 450th Local Guerrilla Company as a reconnaissance unit.

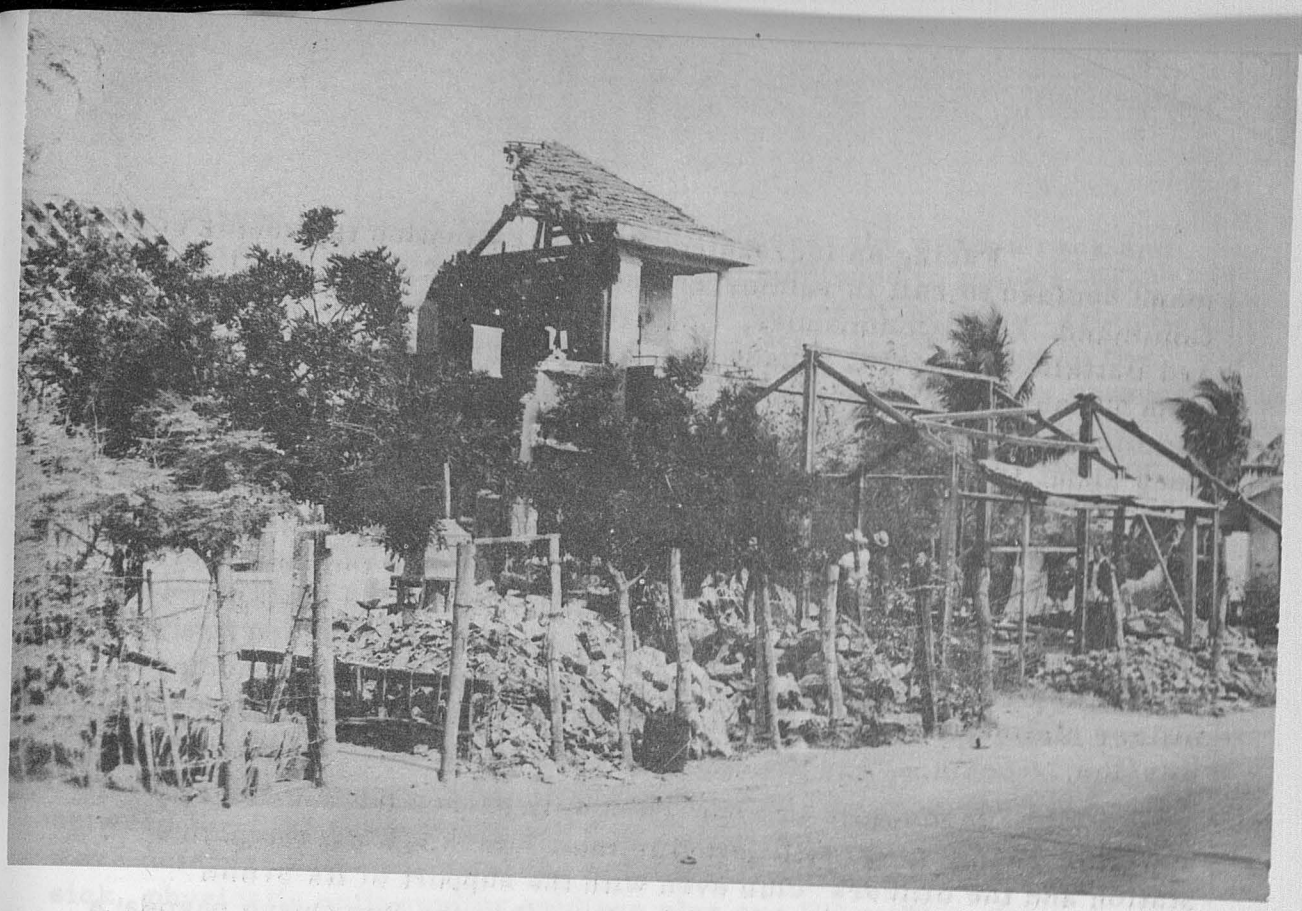
This battalion reached the city around 0300h. Feb 2, and assaulted the police station, which had some 100 police officers, and the adjoining officers' club defended by one militia platoon. While attacking these two points the battalion shelled the Cho Go residential area, the sector command headquarters and the Dinh Cong Trang Camp. Only four soldiers were killed and six wounded at this camp. The other targets did not suffer any casualties or damage. Two filling stations at Luong Muoi and the railroad station were set aflame by the shelling.



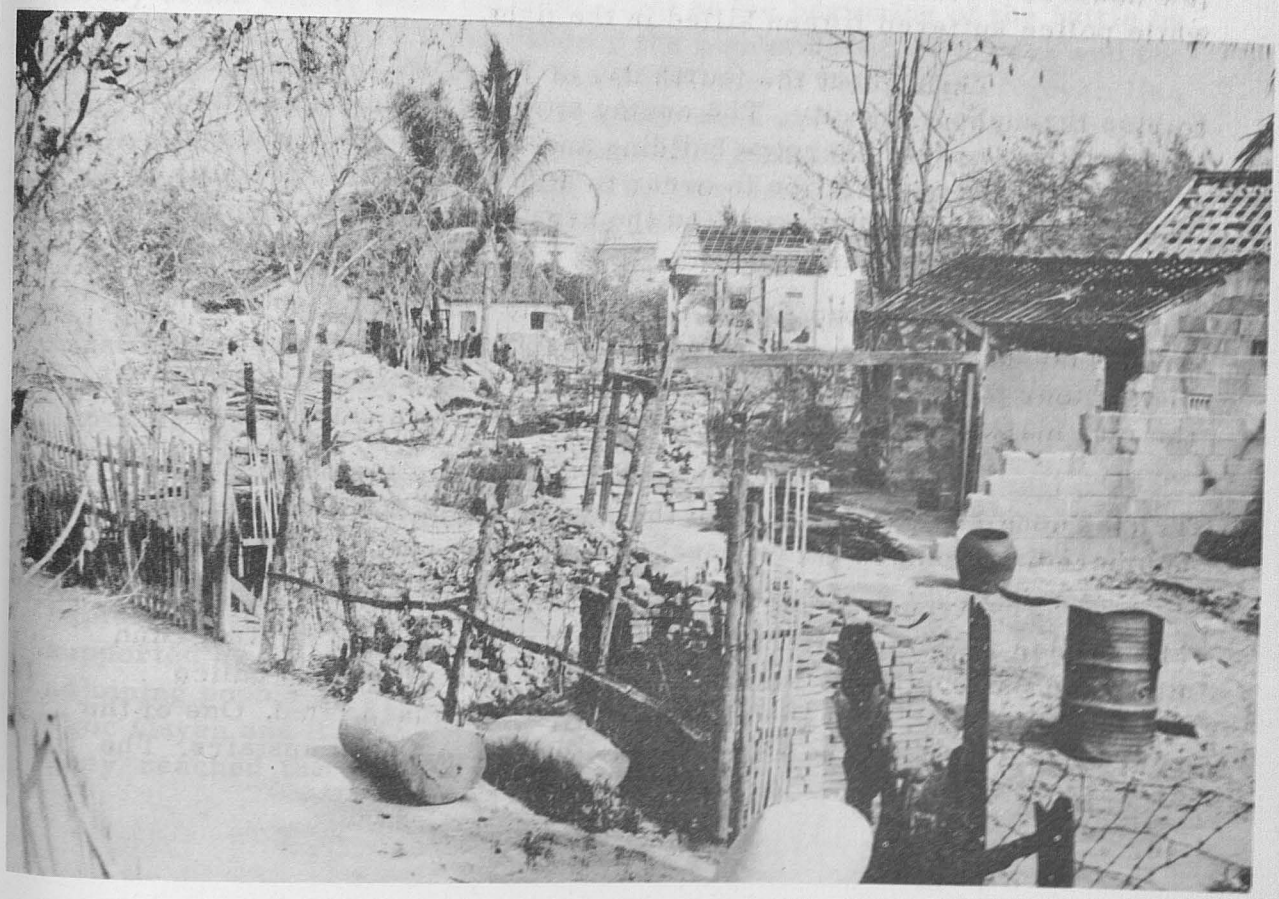
Phan Chu Trinh School



The Binh Thuan High School following
the May offensive



On the way to Trinh Tuong Camp



Facing an increasingly critical situation the sector command decided to call in reinforcements from the 23rd Tactical Zone Command. Zone Commander, Col Truong Quang An, dispatched the 3rd Battalion, 4th APC Squadron and 44th Regiment from Vinh Hao in Ninh Thuan province to rescue the embattled city. The 44th Regt was commanded by Maj Vo Kham. It was intercepted by the enemy in Phu Long about 10kms short of Phan Thiet around 1630 hours Feb 2, It had been moving for eleven hours from its Ninh Thuan home base. It suffered one M. 113 armored personnel carrier (APC) destroyed and two soldiers killed but succeeded in fighting its way into the city where it arrived half an hour later. Two US advisors to the 3rd Battalion were also wounded in the Phu Long clash. The regiment remained at a filling station and refused to enter the Phan Thiet battle. Its commanding officer claimed that the night did not favor its accomplishment of the mission.

Meanwhile in Phan Thiet city proper the numerically superior enemy force still failed in their attack against the police station and the officers' club even with the support of its 57mm recoilless rifle squad which was positioned in the Buu Quang pagoda a few hundred meters away. Six members of the squad were killed while police suffered fifteen killed in the fight.

Throughout the fourth day of Tet, Feb 2, tension continued to rise throughout the city. The enemy attacked and took the Giac Hoa pagoda, the Forestry Service building and dug in inside the park in front of the railroad station in order to attack the Officers' Club. The Xom Con fishing people evacuated the area with many of them going off-shore in their fishing boats.

Airdropped flares lit the whole city throughout the night. Around1400h. the enemy 482nd Battalion appeared and assaulted the city at four places ; the Trinh Tuong Camp, the business section near the city market place, the Dinh Cong Trang Camp and the Y gate.

The enemy did not succeed in their attack against the Trinh Tuong camp in the face of the stubborn resistance of the outnumbered, outgunned but entrenched defenders.

Around 1600h.a reinforced enemy platoon crossed the Muong Man river and attacked the traffic police station on Khai Dinh Road and the Duc Nghia village administrative office. The police station fell swiftly into enemy hands as its few guards fled. One of the guards was wounded and a few of the others simply hid upstairs. The

enemy passed so briefly that he failed to uncover the weapon rack and the officers hiding inside the structure. He continued to move toward the nearby Anh Đao Hotel where he met some resistance from friendly soldiers who were positioned in the multistoried MACV office in the Nga Bay area. A CIDG company was called in to relieve enemy presure from this business section which includes Gia Long, Ly Thuong Kiet and Nguyen Du Streets. By 1115 hours the enemy withdrew to the Con Co slum area which was strafed by fighter planes around 1600h. A fire broke out. The area was not secured until Feb 4 or two days later. While fighting raged in the Nga Bay and Con Co areas civilians moved by the thousands to other beachside areas, many of them rented fishing boats to go to Hon Lao islet.

The third enemy column moved to assault the city's sector complex which was the headquarters of the 44 th Special Zone. This column was estimated at company strength and included 57 and 75mm recoilless rifles. These weapons opened fire from the area between the Dinh Cong Trang and Cao Thanh camps. These two camps were defended by elements of the 441st RF Company who were mostly sick, physically unfit combat soldiers plus one PF militia platoon and one ordnance platoon. The enemy fired their B40 rockets. However many of the enemy were cut down right at the beginning of the battle by a machinegun crew. Flares favored the outnumbered defenders and the accuracy of their gun fire. By daybreak the C.O. , Capt Nguyen Huu Chi, led a relief squad to the area and found several enemy bodies and two recoilless rifles. Enemy snipers shot him down and hit Sgt Le Van Gia who walked right behind him. The captain died shortly after the camp defenders recovered his body and carried it into the camp. It was 0615 h. Feb 3.

The fourth enemy column, estimated at about one platoon, first appeared around 1100 h. Feb 2. It had apparently moved from the Long Hai pagoda area in Duc Long hamlet. It was thrown back by a blocking force.

This critical situation continued throughout the night of Feb 2 before the relief force from the 23rd Tactical Zone from Ninh Thuan entered the picture on the following morning. The 4th APC Squadron rumbled up Highway 1 and reached the Trinh Tuong Camp rapidly, scaring the enemy away. The 3rd Infantry Battalion soldiers, supported by the APC's, followed up with a systematic sweep of the adjoining populated areas. The APC Squadron moved down Luong Ngoc Quyen and Hai Thuong continuing the advance along the road. They reached the stadium opposite the camp around 0900 hours

almost unopposed. The enemy was still holding out in the stadium, The armored vehicles did not enter the stadium through the main gate but smashed its wall at two places to enter from both flanks instead. This maneuver caught the enemy by surprise and unprepared for the counterattack . On the one flank the APC's smashing of the wall killed 17 enemy who were positioned right behind it. The troop rushed to the back of the stadium where the enemy had abandoned two recoilless rifles, one 57 and one 75mm. These two guns had been positioned too close to the Dinh Cong Trang Camp by the enemy and therefore were stopped by camp defenders who destroyed their crews with machinegun fire. Only a few hours earlier attempts to capture these weapons had cost the life of Capt. Chi and had wounded a Sergeant. The enemy never ventured to retake them. The armor troop commander, Lt Lam, jumped out of his armored carrier to seize the two recoiless rifles. Right at the split second he was stepping back into his waiting APC a burst of AK automatic rifle fire was heard and the youthful lieutenant was hit. Fortunately enough he was just hit in one of his hands.

For two hours, fighting raged until 1100 h. in and around the stadium. The APC's liberated the Dinh Cong Trang Camp and then moved out to be refuelled and resupplied at the sector command. Fifty enemy bodies were counted in the area.

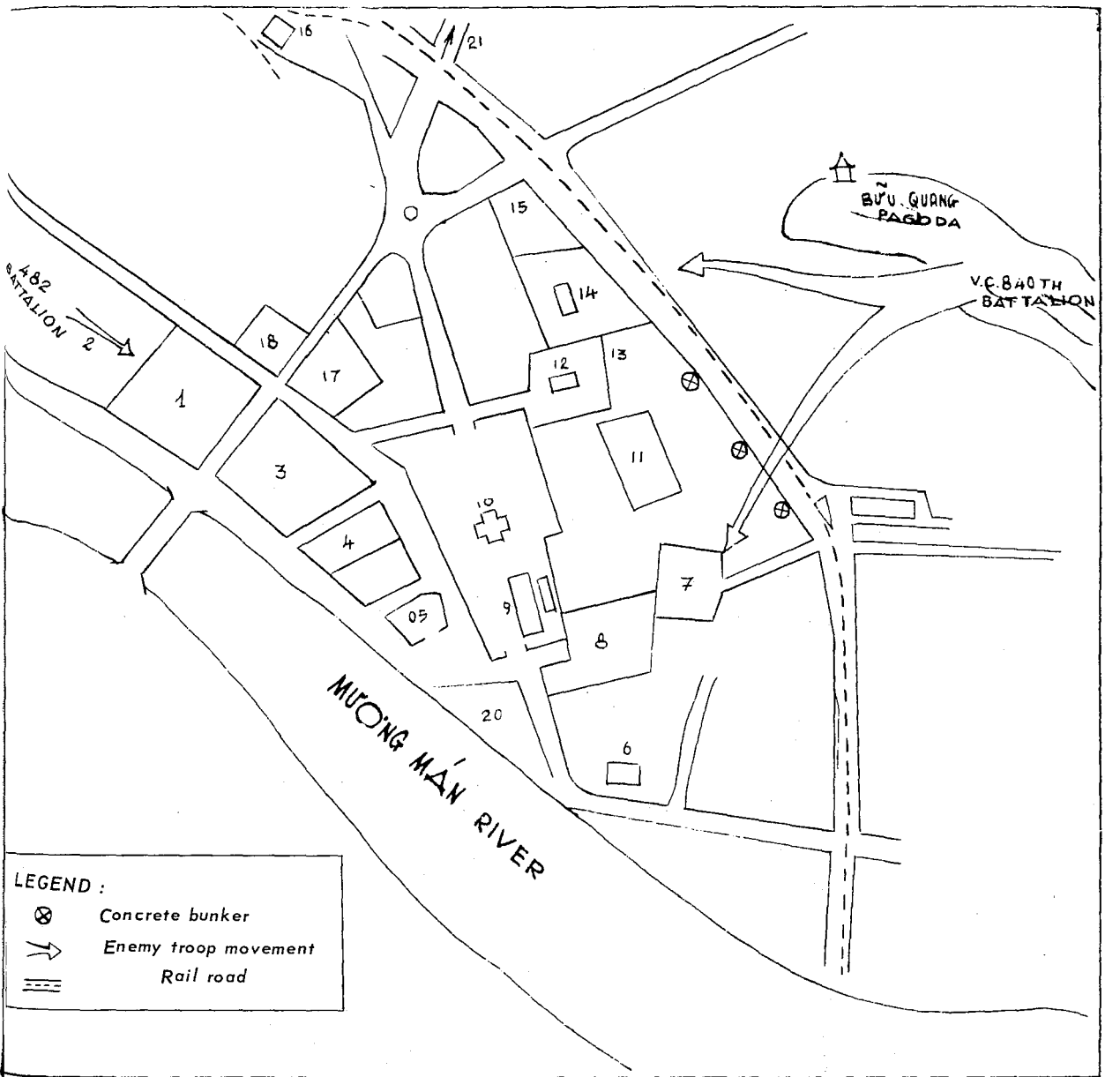
The battle around the camp was still far from finished. Around 1400h. the APC's returned to the area and maneuvered behind the enemy positions to support a ground sweep by foot soldiers. Another armor officer was wounded during this encounter. Enemy pressures noticeably subsided around the camp as night fell. The enemy 480th Battalion left only a small element behind to fight a delaying action to enable its main force to get away. Four kms NE of the city this larger enemy element was intercepted by a blocking force at Ben Noi bridge. The engagement resulted in 17 enemy killed and 20 captured. Also captured were four AK-47 and one mortar.

On the sixth day of Tet, Feb 4, friendly forces continued their sweep operations in the city and its suburbs. Included among these forces was 3/506 US Battalion. The city returned to normal on the following day. It was quiet until Feb 8 when enemy gunners shelled and set afire the fuel depot of the 131st Company destroying some 350,000 litres of gas and 270,000 litres of diesel oil.

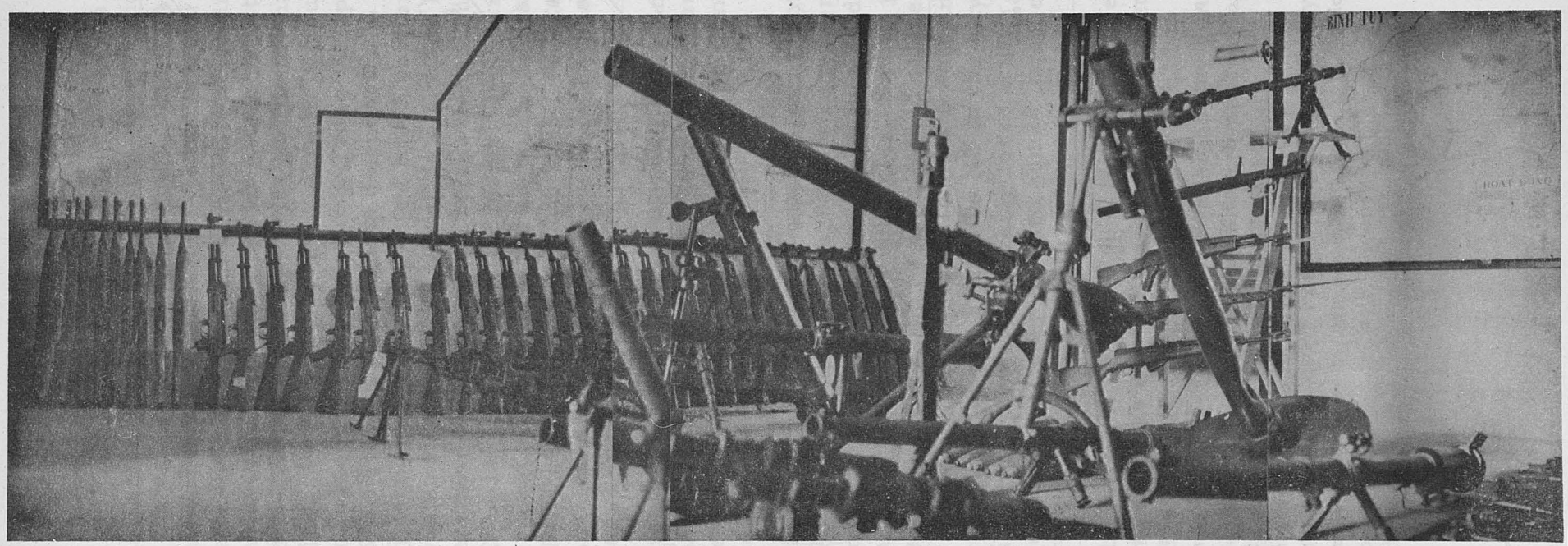
The following is a balance sheet of the 15-day Phan Thiet battle :

VC. ATTACKS IN PHAN-THIET

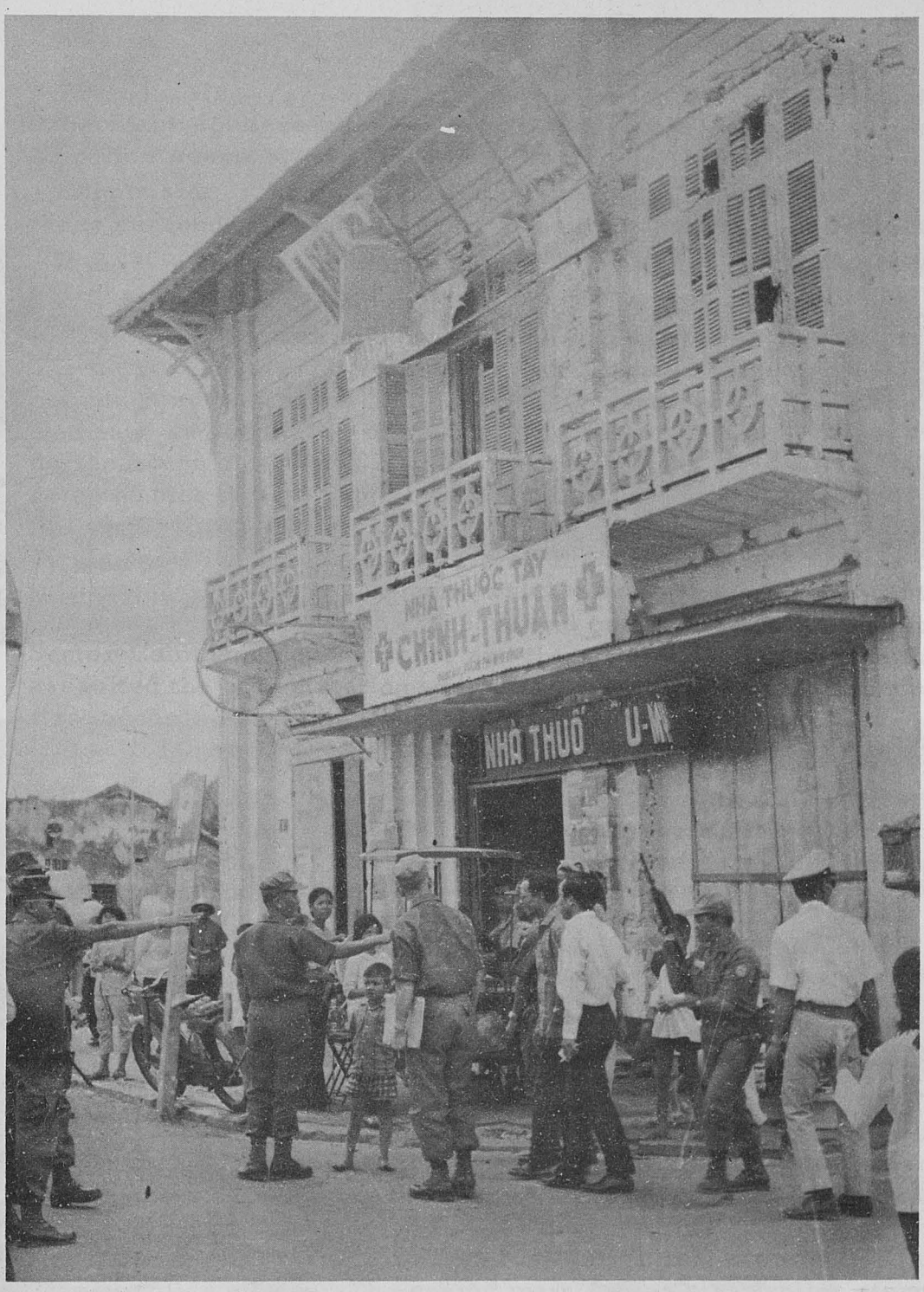
(SECOND WAVE)



1. Quang-Trung Camp
2. Primary School
3. Park
4. Tennis Court
5. Memorial
6. Chinh-Tam School
7. Prison
8. Public Work Service
9. Sector Hqs
10. Government House
11. Cathedral
12. Power Station
13. RD Storage area
14. National Police
15. Officier's Club
16. Station
17. Post Office
18. Treasury
19. Hai-Thuong Lan-Ong Street
20. De-Tham Camp
21. National Route 1 (toward Ninh-Thuan)



VC weapons confiscated in Phan Thiet



Only small battle was recorded in the downtown section of Phan Thiet. It took place at the Anh Dao Hotel which five VC agents had occupied.



The local prison was completely destroyed in the 2nd wave of attacks .



Behind what was the prison building.

- Friendly side : 99 killed, 344 wounded and two missing, including 6 Americans soldiers killed and 100 wounded; 36 weapons lost including 27 police weapons, one M113 carrier was destroyed.
- Enemy side : some 450 killed including coolie laborers, 28 captured, three surrendered and 199 weapons and one AN/PRC-10 radio seized. The weapons captured included four recoilless rifles, two mortars and twelve B40 and B41 rocket launchers.

The enemy launched his second ground assault on Phan Thiet city around 0100h.Feb 18. It was a two-pronged action. The first column consisted of the 482nd Battalion reinforced by the 485th Artillery Company and a number of sappers and coolie laborers moved from the northeastern side of the city to attack the Quang Trung Camp. This camp houses the staff of the Binh Thuan sector command and the city's military command. The enemy might well be in a position to seize the adjoining provincial administrative compound if he could attack through this camp. The second column, which was composed of the 840th Battalion and a number of sappers and coolie laborers, assaulted the Sector Command headquarters and the jail. At the same time they assaulted the police station which they had failed to attack during their first assault over two weeks earlier.

The enemy's second column did a better job than the first one. It overran the jail easily, liberating some 700 prisoners, and then occupied the populated areas adjoining the sector command headquarters. The fighting resulted in extensive destruction of these residential sections. A recounting of their actions follows :

This column first opened heavy weapon fire on one of the two half-underground bunkers guarding the entrance to the sector command compound. The enemy followed this up with a ground assault which brought him into the compound. One of the bunker guards was killed. The few remaining guards killed three enemy before withdrawing in the face of the superior enemy force. An estimated two enemy companies overran part of the sector compound through this entrance. A PF element, led by Nguyen Van Dai, was assigned to intercept the enemy and slow down his invasion of the compound. It simply avoided contact with the superior enemy force. Using heavy volumes of small arms fire the enemy also pinned down the policemen manning the nearby police station. The enemy main force, meanwhile, stormed into the jail guarded by one RF platoon which failed to react. After liberating some of the prisoners and taking away a number of others the enemy entrenched himself inside the jail and prepared to attack

those portions of the province administrative headquarters and the sector command compound which he had failed to overrun earlier. He slammed mortar and rocket shells into the sector and administrative headquarters from the jail compound. The watch-tower on top of the headquarters was almost destroyed by enemy rockets.

Simultaneously the enemy's first column entered the girl's elementary school from where it attacked the Quang Trung Camp. This column appeared to have failed to time its attack on the camp to coincide with the second column. This delay helped the city's deputy military commander, Lt Col Nguyen Huu Đinh, to regroup his troops for an efficient counterattack. All the enemy assault waves on the camp were turned back with the defenders suffering no fatalities.

Fighting continued all day long and with neither side gaining the upper hand. Meanwhile civilian refugees from the nearby Phu Trinh hamlet fled from their homes across the city's only steel bridge toward the safer southern bank of the city.

During the night of Feb 18 the enemy shelled the Y gate killing one field policeman and wounding another. Three rounds of enemy mortar fire landed on the Vo Tanh,Nguyen Tri Phuong downtown section around daybreak but caused no casualties. One round was a dud.

The situation worsened on the following morning as the enemy continued to entrench in concrete structures including the Health Service and Labor Service offices in Phu Trinh Hamlet. An enemy group moved against the house of a Nationalist Chinese medical unit which fought back. This team included two doctors and eight nurses who later managed to escape after killing six enemy. The team suffered one wounded. The Dinh Cong Trang Camp was only subjected to harassing mortar fire which killed one ordnance soldier. The Trinh Tuong Camp which is located in the same general area was left undisturbed.

The friendly forces of the sector included one armor troop which was blocking the enemy's infiltration routes and two RF recon platoons plus the 954th RF Company which were positioned to block the eastern side of the jail compound. The city's one steel bridge, though only about 100 meters away from the closest enemy position was still firmly held by friendly troops.

A company of the US Mike Force and a company of the US Task Force 3/506, supported by Ontos tanks equipped with six recoilless rifles each, reached the Phan Thiet Girls Elementary

School around 1000h. Feb 18. to reinforce the Quang Trung Camp defenders. These American units assaulted the school under the covering fire of the Ontos. As the covering fire lifted, they had to withdraw since the enemy held out fiercely from their entrenched positions. The enemy positions were so close to the friendly ones as to make close air support almost impossible. Airstrikes were conducted against enemy positions in other areas such as Binh Hung, Phu Vinh, Dai Tai, the city's slaughter-house, and Giang Thanh. An estimated enemy company also held out in the jail compound. More friendly reinforcements came. Two companies of the 3/44 Vietnamese Infantry Battalion reached the city's sector command headquarters in the afternoon. The commanding officer of the 23rd Tactical Zone, Col Truong Quang An arrived aboard a chopper around 1600 h.

Col An ordered the relief battalion to recapture the jail before sundown. The Battalion, commanded by Maj Mai Nang Luong, was taken over by Col. An after the major was hit in the stomach while trying to take a good look at enemy positions from a vantage point in the multi-storied Chinh Tam School. Col. An fired his pistol and hurled rocks from behind his men to encourage them to storm the enemy positions. The assault on the jail was so strong that the enemy was cornered in one of the wards. A grenade assault wiped out the last enemy remnants. Thirty seven enemy bodies were counted. One Paillard Bolex movie camera containing a short strip of exposed film was seized from an enemy body. The film strip contained pictures of the enemy's attack on the Trinh Tuong Camp filmed during his first assault two weeks earlier.

The jail was completely retaken about 1700h. Feb 18. This action also resulted in the relief of the besieged police station which had come under enemy mortar fire from the Buu Quang pagoda area.

From 0200h. to daybreak Feb 19 the enemy attempted to attack other points in the city but failed everywhere. Throughout the day of Feb 19, the enemy still held out in the populated areas of Tran Cao Van, Cho Go and the city hospital.

Other enemy elements positioned from Phu Tai Hamlet to the slaughter house as well as in the Phu Khanh and Phu Phong B hamlets across the river were strafed by jet planes from dawn to dusk.

The American units, meanwhile, fighting the enemy in the girls elementary school and neighboring populated areas, still failed to flush him out of these positions. The enemy had dug solid trenches and

foxholes from which they successfully withstood heavy fire from the American Ontos tanks. The enemy fought back at the assaulting American troops to pin them down again and again. This seesaw battle lasted two days until sundown Feb 19 when airstrikes and heavy tanks were called in. From their positions inside the school the enemy continued harassing fires on the Sector Command headquarters throughout the night. Airstrikes to support the Vietnamese troops, who had taken over from the American force on this battle front were resumed around 0730 hours Feb 20. When the Vietnamese troops, commanded by Lt Lu Tay Tuu, moved in they met only scattered, weak enemy resistance by a rear-guard element of platoon size. This element had been assigned the mission of fighting a delaying action to help the main force pull out from the school under cover of darkness. The rear guard also managed to escape later. The school was left a shambles.

Around 0900h the enemy attacked the Vietnamese positions in Phu Khanh and Phu Long B hamlets. He was thrown back as airstrikes were called in and a CIDG company attacked from his rear.

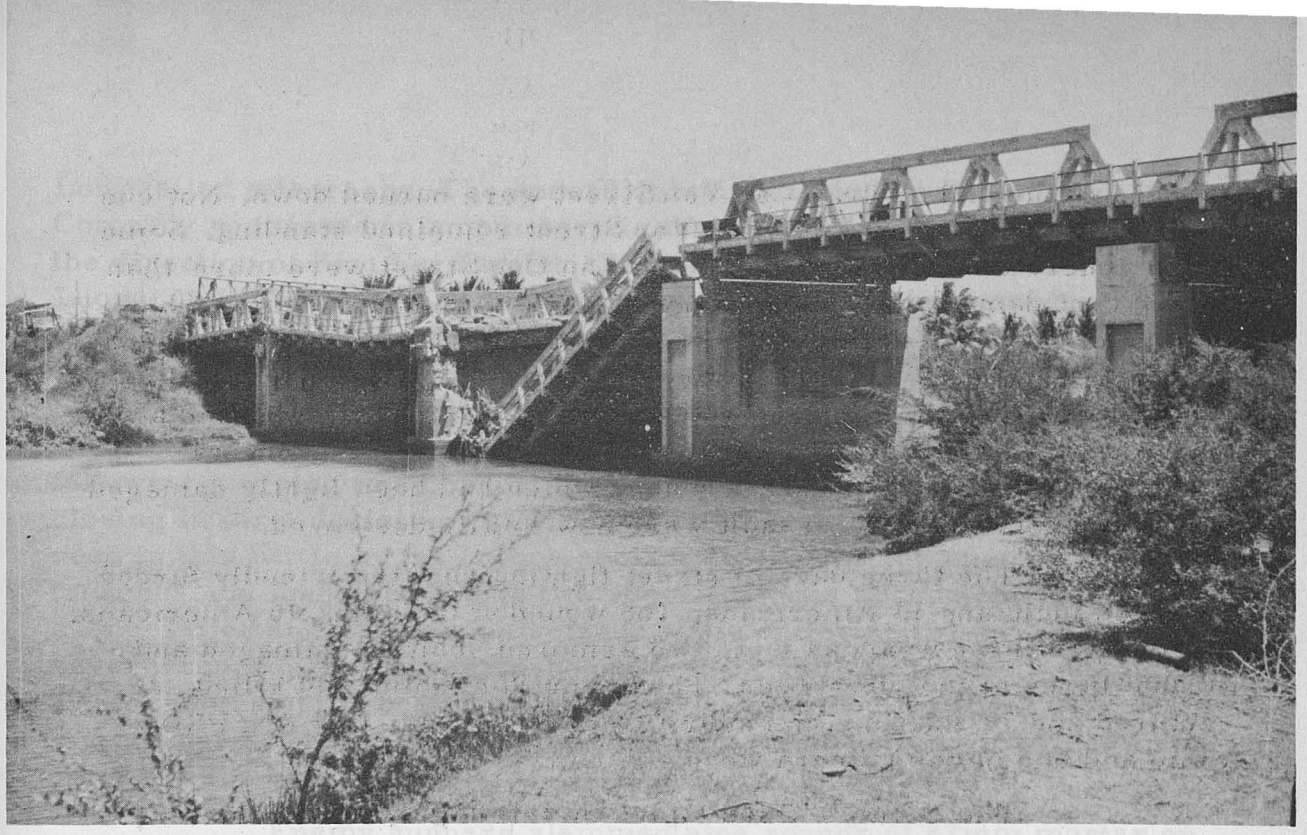
During the night friendly artillery and gunships struck enemy positions in suburban areas. No results were reported.

The following day, Feb 21, the enemy pulled back to Phu Khanh and Phong Phu B hamlets on the northwestern outskirts of the city. They also pulled back to Vinh Thuy and Vinh Phu hamlets on the eastern outskirts. Refugees came in from Lai An and crowded almost all public places inside the city. The Lai An area, which had been seriously damaged during the last assault, was not a good staging area for the enemy.

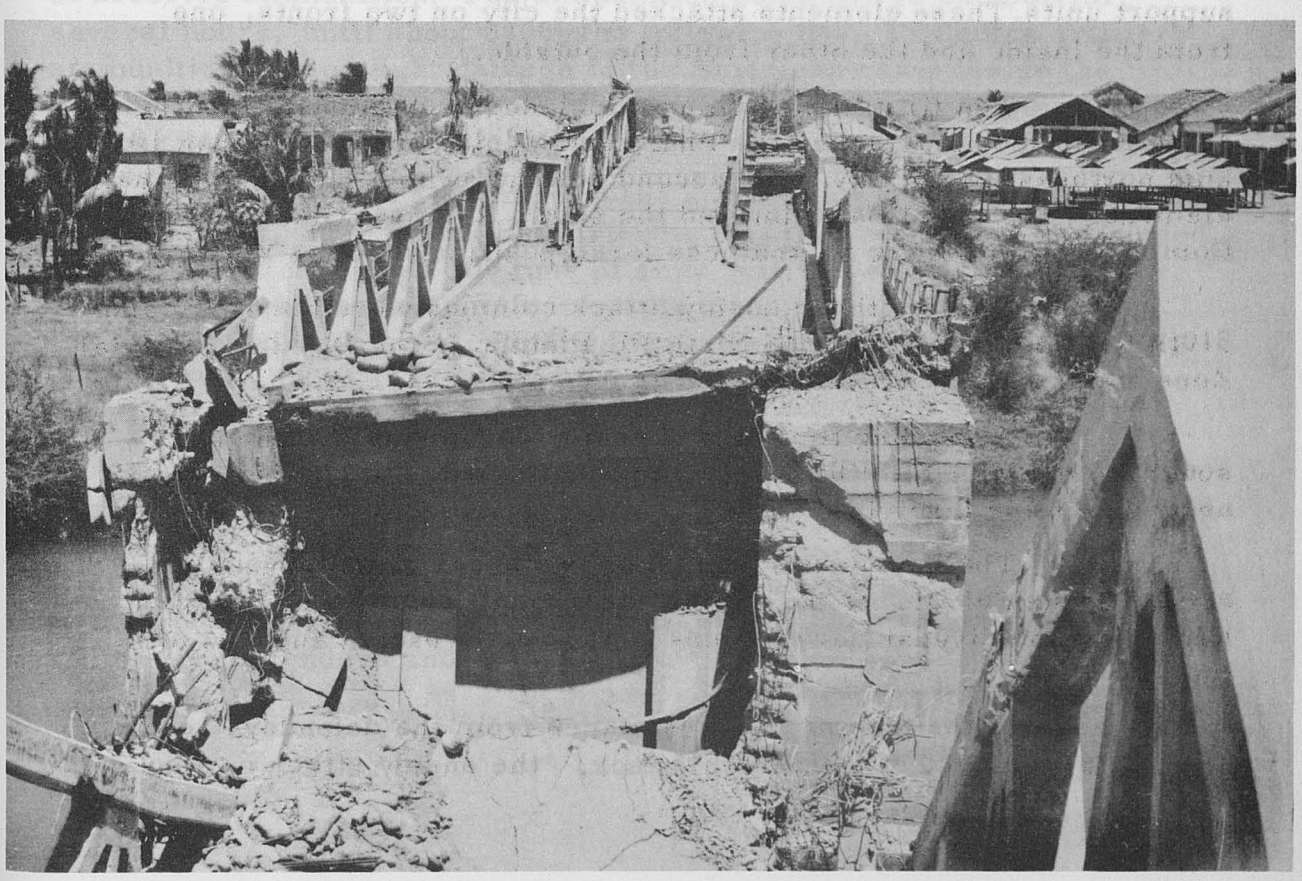
Post fighting searches of former battle areas ended around 1100 h. Thereafter the people were allowed to go about freely.

All the civilian houses and public offices in the areas of the girls school, Tran Cao Van, Hai Thuong Lan Ong, Nguyen Hoang, Phuong market, Forestry Service and city police station were either destroyed or seriously damaged by the fighting. Refugees returned to their wrecked houses to salvage all that could be of some use to them and then returned to live temporarily in the safer business sections on the southwestern bank of the river. The few houses which luckily escaped serious damage were also emptied of all their furniture.

The civilian property damage sustained was the greatest in the city's memory. All the houses between the girls elementary



The Phu Long Bridge



school and the end of Tran Cao Van Street were burned down. Not one house on either side of Tran Cao Van Street remained standing. Some thirty concrete houses on Hai Thuong Lan Ong Street were more than 30 per cent damaged. A great many of the slum houses within 250 meters of the Forestry Service Office were levelled to the ground while the houses between this office and the police station were almost total losses. In the Binh Hung area many houses which were adjacent to the jail, the public works service and the military dependents' quarters were gutted. Several houses which had been lightly damaged during the enemy's first assault were now totally destroyed.

The three days of street fighting cost the friendly forces 43 killed including 13 Americans, 168 wounded including 46 Americans. There were three weapons lost, two armored vehicles damaged and 80,000 litres of fuel destroyed. The enemy lost some 200 killed, 20 captured and 78 weapons, including 17 crew served. One AN/PRC 10 radio and one movie camera were seized.

The enemy's third attack on this highly vulnerable city took place on Feb 25 and 26, only four days after his second attack ended. His attacking force included elements of the 482nd Battalion and the 480th Regional Guerrilla Company reinforced by some small support units. These elements attacked the city on two fronts, one from the inside and the other from the outside.

The first enemy column included two companies of the 482th Battalion. It attacked the Phu Long Special Zone more than 10 kms northeast of the city. The second column, which included a small element of the 482nd Battalion and the 480th Regional Guerrilla Company, attacked the Vietnamese force positioned at the Y gate area.

Oposing these enemy attack columns were the 443rd and 510th RF Companies plus the Ninth PF Platoon in the Phu Long Special Zone and the 127th RF Company at the Y gate.

According to captured enemy documents the enemy sought to overrun the Phu Long compound in order to obtain badly needed foot and mecicine.

The enemy attacked these two areas simultaneously around 0800h.Feb 25. At the same time a small enemy unit initiated harassing and diversionary actions in the northwestern suburbs of the city.

In the face of stiff resistance from the defenders led by 3rd Lt Hai the hero of the counterattack, the enemy attack on Phu

Long failed miserably. The second column attacked the 127th RF Company positioned in a cemetery in the Y gate area on its flank from the direction of Kim Hai hamlet. The enemy was outmaneuvered by the Luong Son CIDG Company and an armor platoon. These friendly elements cornered the enemy within the beachside hamlet. The enemy was backed against the sea with no apparent route of escape. He had to fight a desperate battle from his sandy foxholes and trenches. Two RF recon platoons, led by Lt Lu Tay Tuu, were rushed into the area the following morning to surround the enemy even more tightly before closing in for a decisive battle. Hand grenades were the key weapons used in this battle by the troops seeking to destroy the enemy in his trenches and foxholes. These two recon platoons accounted for 27 enemy killed and 28 weapons seized, while suffering two killed and seven wounded. The house-to-house fighting left the hamlet a shambles. The Buddha statue, behind which the troops formed for their assault. lost its head. Throughout the fighting no air support was provided friendly troops in the area.

Enemy gunners slammed nine rounds of 82mm mortar on the Phan Thiet airfield complex while the fighting raged in this area. Six rounds hit the Army ammunition depot destroying some 300 tons of assorted ammunition. The ammunition continued to explode for several hours, until about 0800h.the following day. Exploding artillery ammunition caused light damage to the American camp inside the airfield. It also burned down the Air Vietnam lounge and destroyed a number of vehicles, radio equipment and weapons.

The fire also marked the end of the enemy's third attack on Phan Thiet. This attack cost friendly forces nine killed, 65 wounded. Lost were : 2 carbines, 300 tons of ammo, two crew served weapons, 3 radios, 3 vehicles and one water tank trailer. The enemy suffered 138 killed, 10 captured, including the underground administrative chief of Phan Thiet. 43 of their weapons were seized 12 of which were crew-served.

The enemy's fourth attack on Phan Thiet consisted only of an assault on the Phu Long Special Zone where he had suffered heavily from his third attack only two weeks earlier. The fourth attack took place around 0100h.Mar 12. The enemy drove the troops out of the Phu Long Special Zone compound sometime before daybreak killing five defenders and wounding 45.

school and the end of Tran Cao Van Street were burned down. Not one house on either side of Tran Cao Van Street remained standing. Some thirty concrete houses on Hai Thuong Lan Ong Street were more than 30 per cent damaged. A great many of the slum houses within 250 meters of the Forestry Service Office were levelled to the ground while the houses between this office and the police station were almost total losses. In the Binh Hung area many houses which were adjacent to the jail, the public works service and the military dependents' quarters were gutted. Several houses which had been lightly damaged during the enemy's first assault were now totally destroyed.

The three days of street fighting cost the friendly forces 43 killed including 13 Americans, 168 wounded including 46 Americans. There were three weapons lost, two armored vehicles damaged and 80,000 litres of fuel destroyed. The enemy lost some 200 killed, 20 captured and 78 weapons, including 17 crew served. One AN/PRC 10 radio and one movie camera were seized.

The enemy's third attack on this highly vulnerable city took place on Feb 25 and 26, only four days after his second attack ended. His attacking force included elements of the 482nd Battalion and the 480th Regional Guerrilla Company reinforced by some small support units. These elements attacked the city on two fronts, one from the inside and the other from the outside.

The first enemy column included two companies of the 482th Battalion. It attacked the Phu Long Special Zone more than 10 kms northeast of the city. The second column, which included a small element of the 482nd Battalion and the 480th Regional Guerrilla Company, attacked the Vietnamese force positioned at the Y gate area.

Oposing these enemy attack columns were the 443rd and 510th RF Companies plus the Ninth PF Platoon in the Phu Long Special Zone and the 127th RF Company at the Y gate.

According to captured enemy documents the enemy sought to overrun the Phu Long compound in order to obtain badly needed foot and mecicine.

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A number of factors contributed to the outcome of this section. The garrison had just gotten a new commander who had directed losing battles during previous enemy assaults on the city. The new commander replaced 3rd Lt Hai, who was sick and hospitalized. His takeover so demoralized the troops that they were reluctant to fight. In addition the enemy was more experienced now than during his third attack.

The compound was retaken by relief forces around noon the same day, about eight hours after it fell into enemy hands. The recapture of the compound was achieved by a superior friendly force which attacked from two sides. One column consisted of the 3/44 Battalion and an armor troop while the other column included two companies of the Luong Son CIDG Task Force. The relief force suffered 12 killed. The entire Phu Long and adjoining areas were secured during the day. Enemy casualties and losses were unknown.

B. IN THE WAKE OF THE OFFENSIVE.

Scenes of destruction, grim reminders of death and glaring evidence of misery could still be seen in the city one month after the offensive.

The daytime curfew imposed during the offensive caused a severe shortage of potable water. Most, if not all, of the city's private wells were shallow, hand-dug holes with unpalatable brackish water. The people had relied on the machine-drilled deep wells in Duc Long and Phu Khanh hamlets. These unfortunately were located in off-again on again battle zones. Normally two cans of water from these wells cost the local consumer five piastres about 4 US cents for every eight gallons. By the fifth day or Tet, Feb 3, the price had soared up to 20 then 30 piastres, water dropped to 10 piastres on the following day.

Most public schools and offices were damaged or destroyed following these four enemy attacks. Percentage of damage was as follows : the boys elementary school on Tran Hung Dao 10%, the Duc Nghia A 40%, the Duc Nghia B 30%, the girls' elementary school 80%, the Phan Chu Trinh semi-public high school 100%, the Phan Boi Chau high school 30%, the Phu Trinh A 80%, the Binh Hung B 80%, the Phu Tai water plant 40%, the slaughter house 100%, the Health Service office 80%, the Forestry Office 70%, the Irrigation Office 30%, the Public Works Office 60%, the Animal Husbandry Office 60%, the Land Registry Office 60%, the jail 100% and the city police station 30%.

Most of the military installations were untouched. Only a few were lightly damaged. Two military dependents' quarters burned down making a total of 233 families homeless.

Several places of worship such as the Buu Quang, Chua Cat, Gia Hoa pagodas, the Protestant Church and the Stadium Catholic Church were also destroyed. The Binh Quang pagoda took one mortar round and lost a corner of its secondary building which then collapsed.

Some 100 citizens were killed and twice this many wounded and hospitalized. Some 3,383 families or a total of 19,961 persons were left homeless since one out of every five civilian houses was destroyed or seriously damaged. Those structures destroyed included 737 concrete houses, 1645 tin-roofed shacks and 233 thatch houses. Structures damaged but still reparable included 284 concrete, 413 tin-roofed shacks and 63 thatched huts. Most of the property destruction was suffered by the people of suburban hamlets except those in the Duc Thang and Vinh Phu hamlets which saw no fighting. Hardest hit was the Phu Trinh hamlet which was regarded as a complete loss.

There were ten refugee centers in the city. Most of the refugees preferred to take shelter on the beach. They believed the enemy would not be naive enough to move there and get exposed. Most of the refugees came from Phu Trinh and Binh Hung hamlets, the hardest hit areas during the offensive. They pitched tiny makeshift tents on the sand. Here they spent the nights. In the daytime they ventured back to their hamlets whenever they thought they could in hopes of salvaging what consumables they could. One month after the end of the offensive the signs of distress, abject misery and semi-starvation were still on their faces and in their haggard appearance for every visitor to see. The fishermen, who made up the larger part of the local working people, were not allowed to go off-shore to fish because of the nightly curfew. They were closer to starvation than any of the other people.

C. A FEW REMARKS

During the offensive against the city, the enemy suffered a shattering military defeat and over four times as many fatalities as friendly troops.

Some 172 Vietnamese and American troops were killed in action, some 650 wounded, 42 assorted weapons lost, the city's fuel reserves almost completely destroyed 700,000 litres of fuel burned and some 300 tons of assorted ammo destroyed. Last but not least, a fifth of the city's public and private structures were destroyed or irreparably damaged whereas another two-fifths of the civilian property was either moderately or lightly damaged.

On the other side of the balance sheet the enemy lost about 800 killed. These personnel losses included coolie laborers drafted from among the civilians living in enemy controlled areas to carry ammunition and supplies. He also lost 359 assorted weapons, including 63 crew served ones.

The government side also suffered the loss of some 700 prisoners, only a few of whom were recaptured later. Many of these prisoners served the enemy. The number of prisoner-turned guerrillas may have made up for some of the enemy casualties.

According to Maj Vo Kham, commander of the 44th Infantry Regiment during the counter-offensive, the enemy might well have captured the Trinh Tuong Camp had he thrown his 840th and 482nd Battalions into the battle at the same time. The enemy had waited for two days before commiting the 840th battalion to reinforce the 482nd. This caused the enemy to take more casualties. The enemy's delay in committing the 840th Battalion gave the friendly side enough time to send in reinforcements and to defeat both enemy battalions in the battle.

Perhaps the enemy had underestimated the camp's ability to resist long enough to be reinforced by other friendly forces. Maybe the enemy was simply unable to commit the 840th Battalion in time.

During the second attack the enemy tried to correct this mistake. He committed these two battalions simultaneously into one major objective - the Sector Command headquarters. But it was too late for him to succeed. The enemy's hugging tactics hampered friendly use of air and artillery support yet the fighting still caused extensive property damage to the city. The enemy's tactics were skilful and daring indeed. The enemy's defeat can be attributed to the youthfulness of his men - 15 to 16 years old - and their lack of experience and training in street fighting.

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Dalat

A.- BEFORE THE OFFENSIVE

Unlike Nha Trang where a unified command was on hand at the time the enemy offensive broke out, Dalat found itself in a rather embarassing situation as no specific assignments had been defined among the various forces stationed in the area.

In principle, more than 3,000 soldiers belonging to the Military Academy, the riot police training center and the Sector Command should have been available in Dalat City at anytime. But when the enemy attack occurred, although it had been predicted two days before, the number of the city's reserved element turned out to be too small (only 40 men and 5 V-100 armored vehicles). Other forces remained in passive defense positions within their barracks, instead of taking combat positions in and around the city.

As Dalat had been a peaceful, romantic city away from the war, its residents, military and civilians alike, found it hard to believe that their beloved city could ever become a battle ground. This explained the unpreparedness of both sections of the community when the Communists launched their offensive.

It was, the afternoon of the second day of Tet when the Communist offensive against South Vietnamese cities had already spread throughout the country that the Tuyen Duc Sector Command decided to place its troops on alert. But only 60 per cent of the local force could be found and called back to duty from their Tet celebrations although military patrols made house-to-house calls on off duty soldiers. Some of them were found amid excited gambling parties. Commanding officers will learn from this bitter experience that the more peaceful the location of their assignments might appear, the more vigilant they should remain for its defense.

Life in Dalat was normal throughout the third morning of Tet with many vacationers from Saigon flocking into the city. They were very worried by news reports broadcast by the local radio on the fighting flare-up across the country including Saigon.

On the evening of the same day each of the local forces were watching from their own location while Sector Command troops took positions at two strategic points; the command headquarters and

the local administrative building.

B.- THE BATTLE OF DALAT

Before the offensive enemy forces operating in Tuyen Duc province numbered around 200 men divided into two mobile companies for the whole province and four regional platoons for its four districts. Their activities had been limited to scattered attacks against government outposts, minor ambushes against convoys while evading our large-scale operations. Their main purpose had been to destroy our infrastructure at the village and hamlet level around Dalat, seeking influence on, and supply from the local population.

As their regional forces were too weak the Communists had to bring in reinforcements from other places for their offensive against the city. One enemy battalion was reportedly dispatched by the Communist command to the south of Don Duong district a few days before Tet. It was identified as the VC 186th Battalion.

Commanding and staff officers at the Tuyen Duc Sector Command were restless throughout the night of the 3rd day of Tet as they did not know when the enemy would attack (no intelligence reports had indicated they would) or whether the Communists would choose the city itself as target of their offensive as had been the case throughout the rest of the country.

The officers had thought of reinforcing the defense of Dalat by bringing back troops from regions around the city, but they were afraid such measure would adversely affect the morale of the regional authorities and leave open gaps for the enemy to move through. This led to no decision by the sector command gathered in their conference room only for a long wait-and-see session.

And suddenly in the cool spring night of Dalat, the enemy opened fire at exactly 0145h. Following a barrage of 60mm and 82mm mortar rounds from the southeast part of the city toward the sector command headquarters, enemy infantrymen emerged from the dark and launched their assault on the headquarters. They met with fierce resistance by the defenders. Sergeant Tai, who commanded a platoon guarding the headquarters main fortress, was fatally hit by the enemy gunfire minutes after the fighting broke out. However, the fortress did not fall as its defenders helped by our V-100 counter-fire succeeded in repelling the attackers out of the headquarters compound. One of the V-100's was set fire by an enemy

B.40 rocket and burned.

At dawn the Sector Command found that aside from the attack on its headquarters the Communists had taken control of the former Imperial Residence Number Three (since 0130 h.), the Dong Tam Hamlet, the transmission center (abandoned by a Popular Force platoon that fled into the Psywar College), and the Hoa Binh market place.

The command immediately held an emergency meeting of all commanding officers to discuss counter-offensive measures.

Shortly before the meeting started three ARVN officers were killed at the Hoa Binh square. Major Le Tap and two other officers of the Command Staff College were killed by enemy gunfire as their jeep was passing the Hoa Binh Theater on their way to a restaurant near the market. They had not been aware of the overnight developments with the Communists taking control of the market place. Killed with Major Tap were Major Nong Van Thang and Capt. Vu Xuan Sinh. Two other officers Major Nguyen Dinh Tai and Capt. Tran Luong Dong who were on the same jeep escaped unhurt by running into a nearby villa known as "La Tulipe Rouge".

Meanwhile, the command meeting decided to dispatch a company of Dalat military cadets to the Hoa Binh market place to help clear the area. The cadets failed in their mission.

Reinforcements started arriving at 1300h . First to move in was a Regional Force platoon of 25 men from Da Nhim and two armored vehicles heli-borne into the city's stadium. With these reinforcements the local command launched a counterattack at the Hoa Binh Square area, but the advance was hampered by enemy snipers firing from civilian houses. It was only after helicopter gunships were called in that our troops could proceed to destroy the enemy gun positions one by one thereby regaining control of the situation at about 1600h. The battle cost the enemy 22 dead and a loss of 16 weapons of various kinds. Friendly casualties were one killed and 2 wounded. The Hong Chau photo shop was burned by gunfire. The remainder of the enemy force withdrew to Phan Dinh Phung street but no government troops pursued them.

At 1700h.the Regional Forces 306th Company arrived from Duc Trong district and the Sector Command sent the company of cadets back to their academy.

Only sniper fire was reported in the evening while government troops took positions to check further enemy advances. During the night developments, brought the enemy to other areas of the city namely the Du Sinh hill, the Public Works Service, the Pasteur Institute, The Ma Thanh area, the civilian hospital, the Trai Ham street, the Hill 1506, the Chinese Pagoda. The enemy also was able to infiltrate into the city's shopping center. The military schools area remained quiet.

At this point it was noticed that the number of enemy troops was not considerable with only more or less of a platoon at each of the occupied positions.

On the 5th day of Tet government forces were divided into two columns. The first column, composed of the 306th RF Company, the Da Nhim platoon and the V-100 tank, and commanded by Major Dao Mong Xuan, Deputy Province Chief for Security, was to clear the Public office building, the Pasteur Institute and the Special Residence was recaptured by the government forces after several assaults.

The second column was composed of the 302th RF Company which had just reached the city from Thai Phien village. Operating under the command of Maj. Nguyen Phuc Nghiep it quickly dislodged the enemy from the Ma Thanh area.

The two columns then joined in counterattacking the enemy at the civilian hospital. Heavy enemy fire from the city cemetery prevented the troops from advancing and an air strike failed to help the operational force reach their objective. Therefore, they had to withdraw into the city at 1700h. to take up defensive positions for the night.

As soon as the troops left the area, the enemy re-occupied the Public Works Service compound. The Special Residence was at that time under control of the 490th RF Company but this unit was removed for another operation the next morning.

The Sector Command requested new reinforcements from the 23rd Tactical Zone. On the 6th day of Tet a CIDG company arrived from An Lac and immediately joined the other forces in their drive to disloge the enemy from the Public Works - Pasteur Institute area. The operation this time was successful. Twenty-two Communist soldiers were killed in the Pasteur Institute itself. However, the

nearby Du Sinh Hill as well as other surrounding hills and a hamlet in the area still remained under enemy control.

During the night of the 5th day of Tet the enemy was reinforced by the 145th VC Battalion. The cause of its delayed arrival in Dalat was not known but had it reached the area in time for combined action with the 186th VC Battalion the city would have suffered much more serious damage.

With its newly arrived reinforcement the enemy launched a new attack against the Sector Command headquarters at 0130 h. The attack was again repelled with artillery support from the Military Academy. The enemy left behind 5 bodies and 3 AK's.

Early in the morning of the 6th day of Tet enemy forces again occupied the Special Residence and Pasteur Institute areas.

In order to clear the enemy from the Special Residence two government forces were in operation one attacking from behind as a diversionary move, the other launching the main assault uphill. The An Lac CIDG Company was used for the first assaulting wave. It was stopped by enemy fire from bunkers built during the night. Armored vehicles also failed in their try to climb the hillside. The diversion force on the other side of the hill could not move forward either. Air support was called in but only the surrounding hills were strafed to avoid causing damage to the building. Toward the evening the enemy withdrew from the Special Residence but still occupied the surrounding hills. At nightfall one government platoon took position at the Special Residence while the remainder of the friendly forces returned to the city.

The city's shopping center was cleared during the same day but police operation continued on Phan Dinh Phung street.

In the meantime, the 23rd Ranger Battalion, dispatched as reinforcement by the 23rd Tactical Zone Command, arrived in the city at nightfall. The battalion had by mistake crossed an area under enemy control and lost 3 killed and 20 wounded in an unplanned clash with the Communists.

Enemy troops attacked the Sector Command headquarters again during the night but were again driven back by the headquarters' fierce defenders and artillery support as during the previous night. This time the enemy left behind 25 bodies, 15 weapons of various kinds and a quantity of mines and grenades. It was the last enemy

assault against the headquarters.

The next day, the 8th day of the Lunar Year, government troops reoccupied the Pasteur Institute and the Du Sinh Hill. This and its surrounding hills were recaptured after a day-long battle marked by intensive air intervention. The enemy left 4 bodies behind the church and 5 others on the Du Sinh Hill along with some individual weapons. The Du Sinh Hill sustained the most extensive damage caused by the fighting as compared with other areas in the city.

Meanwhile, another government force composed of elements of the 23rd Ranger Battalion on their way to clear the kilometer 4 area was stopped by heavy enemy fire near the Church of Our Lady.

On the 9th day of the Lunar Year, the 304th RF Company from Don Duong district and the 308th RF Company from Duc Trong district were moved into the city to replace the battle weary 302nd and 406th RF companies. The two newly arrived companies were assigned search-and-destroy missions in the Du Sinh Hill area.

On the 11th day new reinforcements reached the city. They included the 11th Ranger Battalion and the Command of the 2nd Ranger Group. Government troops then launched their attack against the last enemy position in the city: the Ma Thanh area and the city cemetery. Dalat was finally cleared of all enemy forces.

On the following days the Rangers continued their operations to areas around the city but no significant contact with the Communists was made as the defeated enemy had quietly vanished.

Bien Hoa

Three days before Tet on January 26, 1968 intelligence reports indicated the presence of three enemy regiments in the jungles just north of Bien Hoa provincial town. They were the 274th and 275th VC Regiments and the DKB Regiment equipped with 122mm rockets.

On January 29 the population at Ho Nai were very worried by reports that the VC had come as near as north of Dong Lach and an enemy reconnaissance team armed with AK 50 rifles had been shot dead by guards in front of the gate of the III Corps Command headquarters at one o'clock in the morning.

Local authorities, however, did not pay much attention to the reports as they did not believe the enemy would violate the Tet Truce and attack the provincial town. That turned out to be what the enemy was preparing for.

The Communist offensive plan was two-fold; the 274th Regiment plus a regional company was to attack the Bien Hoa airfield while the 275th Regiment was to assault the Frenzel Jones camp (Long Binh base) and the III Corps command headquarters.

The two attacks were launched simultaneously at 3 o'clock in the morning of the 2nd day of Tet with a barrage of mortar and rocket fire against both town and airfield. The shelling was concentrated to the eastern side of the airfield while on the west side the VC broke through barbed wire into the perimeter. They were approaching the airfield's hangars when helicopter gunships intervened, firing rockets, machineguns into swarms of panicky enemy soldiers running for cover in all directions.

The enemy was soon forced out of the airfield. Later at day break they withdrew to the north, leaving behind 114 bodies, 41 weapons of various kinds and 24 prisoners including several who caught by the 57th Regional Force Battalion guarding the airfield, had carried explosives intended for the destruction of our planes.

While they attacked the airfield the Communists launched elements of the 275th Regiment against the III Corps command headquarters. Fierce resistance by the defenders forced them to withdraw into civilian houses on both sides of the street.

Another enemy force also composed of elements of the 275th Regiment in the meantime took positions at the Gia Vien area and the Ke Sat cemetery (Ho Nai) about 500 meters away from the Frenzel Jones camp of the US 199th Brigade (Long Binh). The enemy kept firing heavily into the camp in support of a sapper unit that was attempting to penetrate the perimeter through a underground water-pipe. They were not successful and were uncovered before they could emerge.

In the morning of the 2nd day of Tet US armed helicopters repeatedly attacked enemy positions and destroyed Communist anti-aircraft guns between the Ho Nai church and the Phu Tao (Ho Nai) area. They also supported a formation of tanks that attacked the enemy's rear from highway One. Two of the tanks were destroyed by VC B.40 rockets near the Phu Tao church. The others returned to their base.

Toward noon upon learning of the failure of their sapper unit the Communists decided to withdraw to the Dia spring north of Trang Bom. Pursued by helicopter gunships they left behind 100 bodies. Members of the enemy command of the Bien Hoa front were reported among the dead.

The following day ARVN forces and the US 199th Brigade launched a joint search-and-destroy operation around Bien Hoa. A total of 527 Communists were killed and 40 captured.

About 500 civilian houses were burned down during the fighting in front of the III Corps command headquarters, and in the Gia Vien and Phu Tao (Ho Nai) areas. Civilian casualties included 10 dead and 50 wounded.

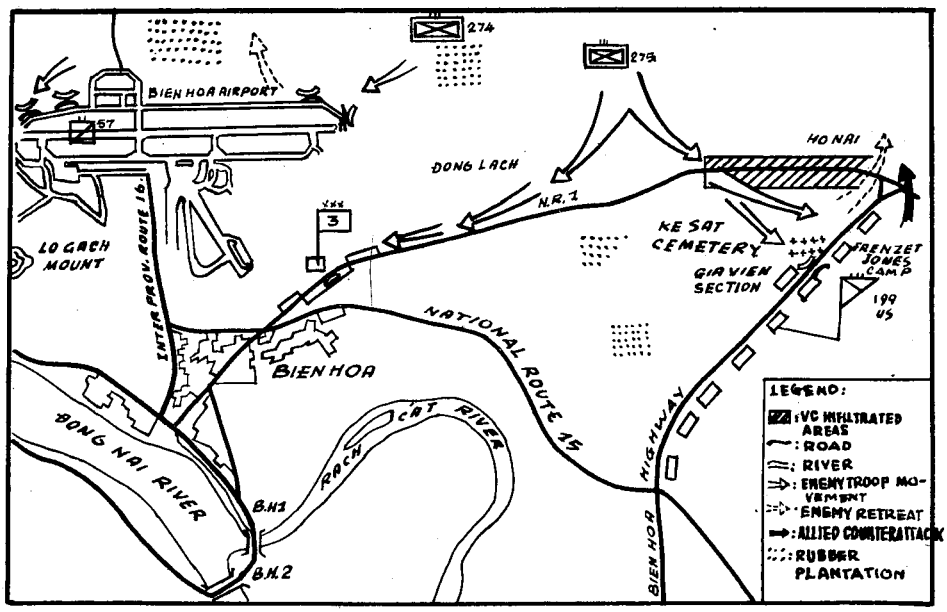
As the fighting ended six refugee centers were immediately set up by the local authorities at the Nguyen Du school, Tan Lap Temple and four other places.

The Roman Catholic priest of the Ho Nai parish later reported that 19 Communists who surrendered at his parish had been overcome with fear and said they had been deceived by their superiors.

The majority of enemy soldiers launched into the battle consisted of North Vietnamese teen-agers who were complete strangers to the area. Ordered by their superiors to "take over" the province they had expected little resistance from our side. Their ranks were completely shattered and destroyed by our heavy fire-

power and in particular by the accurate firing from helicopter gunships during the day and throughout the night as flares lit the sky and countryside.

Although only 30 per cent of our forces were available at the time of the surprise attack, the battle was won without many government casualties because of the Communist over confidence.



THE BIEN -HOA ATTACK

Can Tho

Two communist battalions attacked Can Tho. They were the 303rd battalion and the U Minh battalion with a total of more than 500 men. They infiltrated into the city through the swampy fields to the west.

Two days before Tet many Viet Cong groups had reached the western edge of the city without the local authorities knowing it. In support of their planned attack against the city they even set up a logistics network composed of three stations;one at Cau Nhiem, one at Ba Xe and one at Phong Dien. In the meantime, VC sapper units also infiltrated into the city to conduct sabotage and promote propaganda before the offensive.

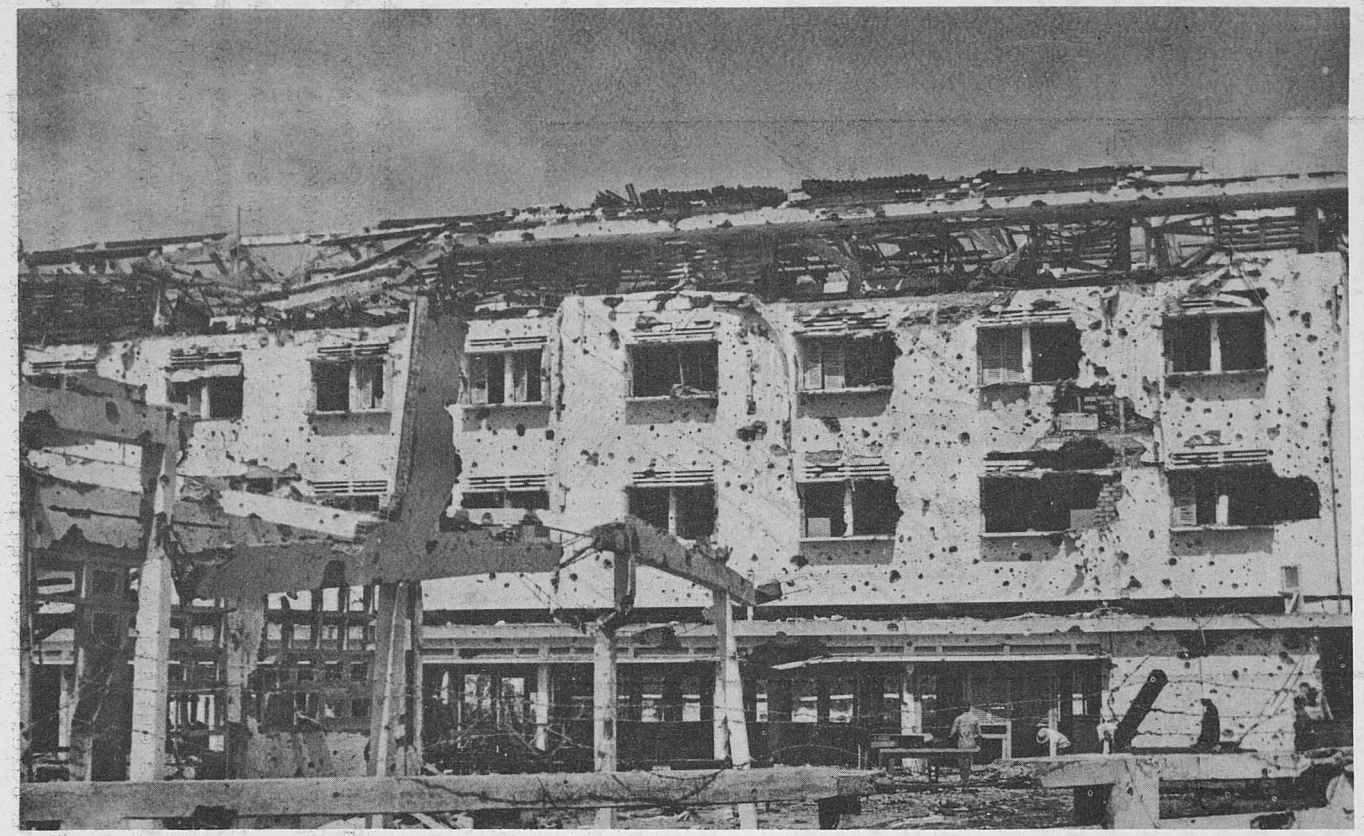
A group of Communists disguised as tourists came to the Nam Phuong Hotel planning to use it as a liaison center. They were arrested by local police soon after their arrival. No information could be obtained about the presence of the two VC battalions around the city, and no alert was ordered as a result. Only a company of Rangers was stationed at the Sector Command. Personnel at other military installations remained reduced to 30 per cent.

The enemy launched their offensive against the city at exactly 3 o'clock in the morning of the 2nd day of Tet according to the following plan :

- The 303rd Battalion, also known as the Tay Do Battalion, with the help of the sappers was to attack the IV Corps command headquarters and its transmission center while the U Minh Battalion with the assistance of underground political cadres, was to occupy the radio station, the university and the connecting streets.

With this plan the Communists were seeking a military victory coupled with a popular uprising they expected to bring about through announcements over local radio station. They failed to reach either goal.

Government reinforcements came at daybreak and a counter offensive was immediately launched. Our forces quickly had the situation at the Command Headquarters and Transmission Center under control, but enemy pressure remained heavy at the radio station, the university compound, the Nam Phuong Hotel and



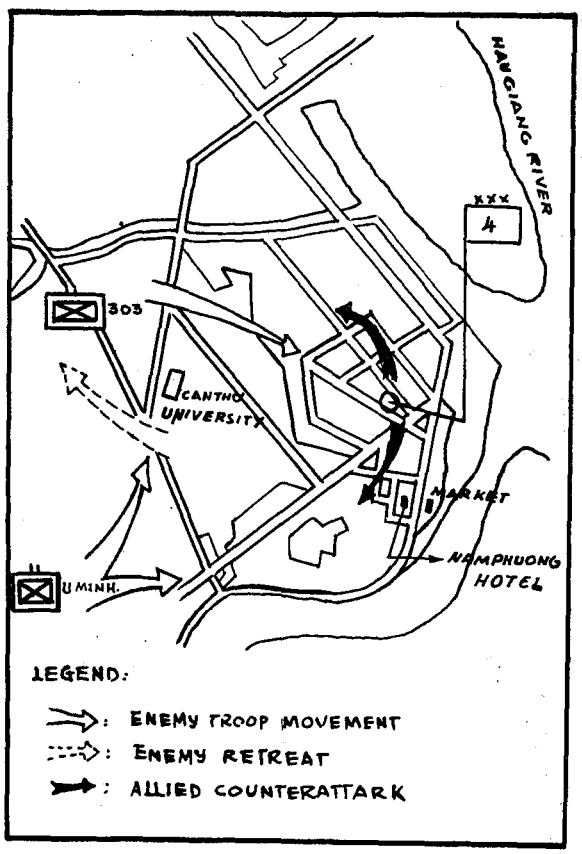
A building of the University of Can Tho
following the May offensive.

the market place. Through house to house fighting, our troops were advancing rather slowly for the sake of civilian lives and properties.

The enemy pressure ended the next morning as the Communist forces had withdrawn from the city during the night. They remained on the city's outskirts.

During the night of the 6th day of Tet the enemy returned to the city and occupied the university compound. Air strikes were called in to dislodge the Reds. The three storey, newly constructed building was destroyed.

The battle of Can Tho cost the enemy 100 killed and 40 captured. Government casualties were 44 dead and 70 wounded. In addition, 1,032 civilian houses were destroyed.



FIRST PHASE ATTACK IN CANTHO CITY

Kien Hoa

On the morning of the 3rd day of Tet a BBC broadcast from London announced that Kien Hoa town had been overrun by the Communists. In reality, the Reds only took control of the town's commercial area while at the administrative area, they were still encircling government civilian and military installations.

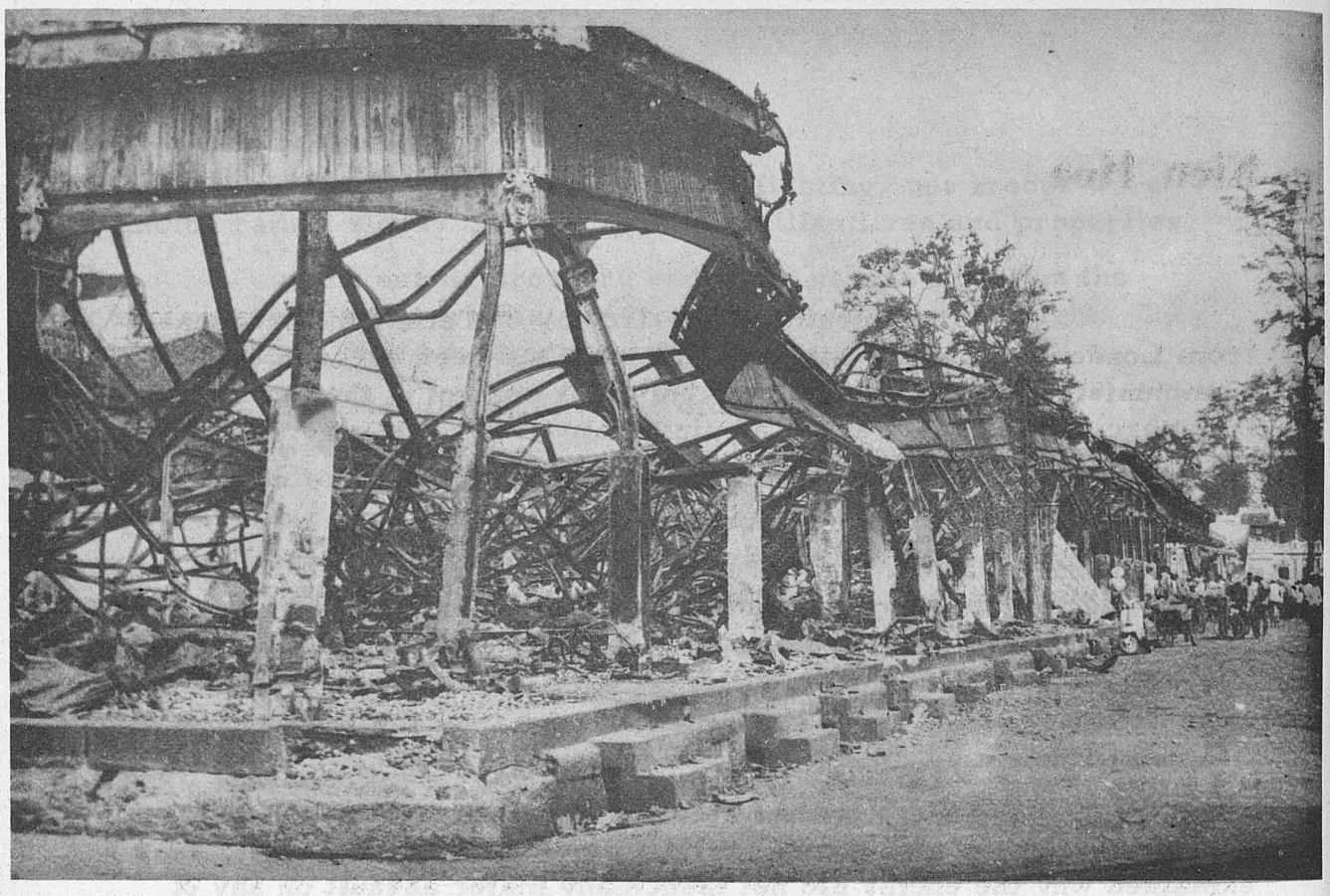
The time the Communists entered the town was unknown, but the first outbreak of gunfire occured at 4 AM at the local stadium where a government artillery unit was positioned.

The enemy offensive began with a barrage of mortar fire into civilian and military agencies particularly the provincial administrative office and the command headquarters of the 10th Infantry Division.

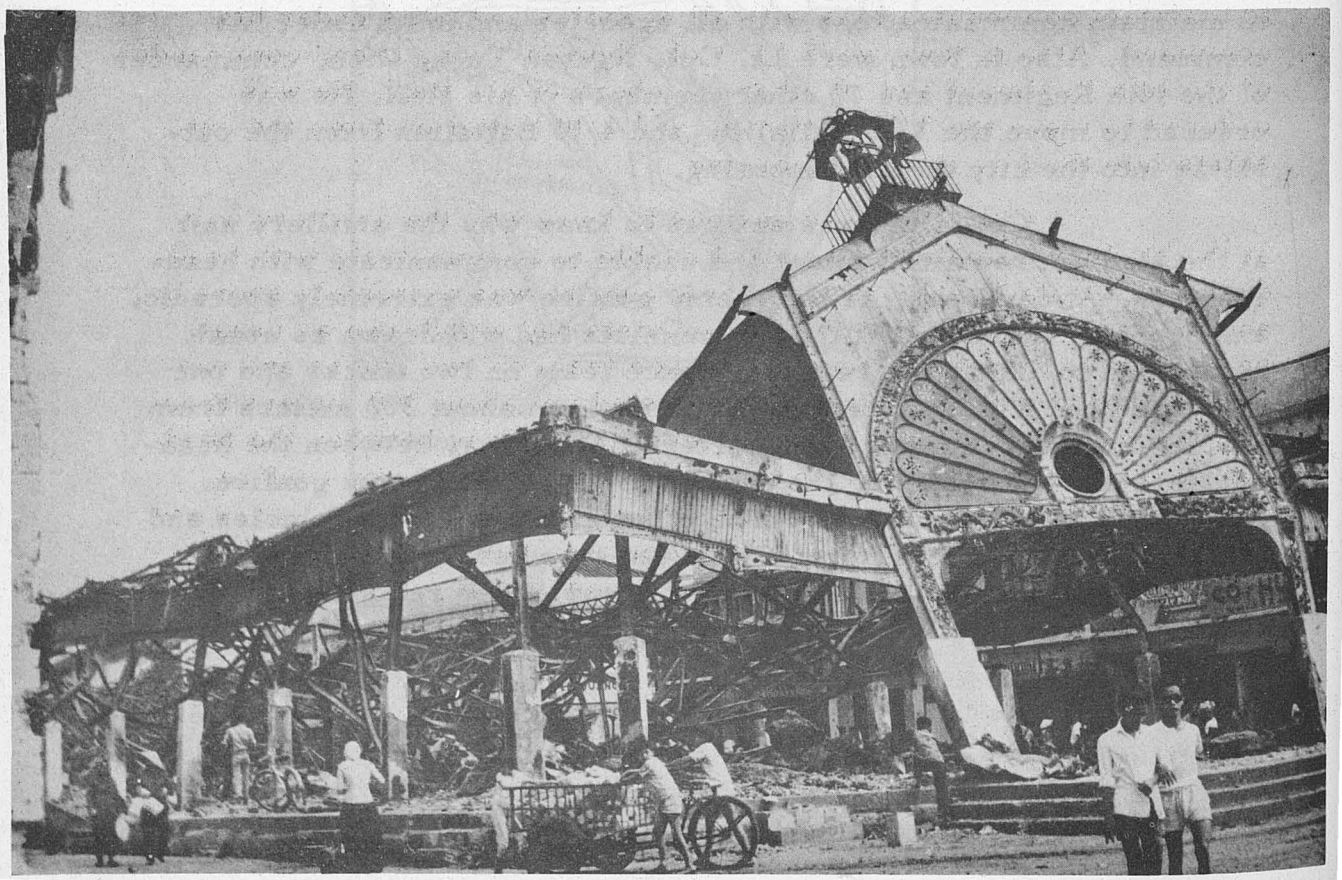
As Kien Hoa had been facing a constant enemy threat the bunker complexes built within the city were relatively solid. This explained why the enemy did not launch any major assault on any of the town's strategic positions. Instead, from 4 AM until dawn, they kept firing into those locations at scattered interval .

Lt. Col. Huynh Van Du, the province chief, was able to maintain communications with all agencies and units under his command. Also in town were Lt. Col. Nguyen Tuong Dien, commander of the 10th Regiment and 70 other members of his staff. He was ordered to move the 3/10 Battalion and 4/10 Battalion from the outskirts into the city the next morning.

Col. Dien was anxious to know why the artillery unit at the stadium remained silent and unable to communicate with headquarters. At daybreak, as the enemy gunfire was extremely sporadic, and probably thinking that the Communists had withdrawn as usual, he decided to dispatch a reconnaissance team on two trucks and one jeep equipped with machinegun to the stadium about 300 meters from the regimental command headquarters. At halfway between the headquarters and the stadium, the men were caught by enemy gunfire. Some were killed or wounded. The others abandoned the vehicles and ran back to the headquarters. Col. Dien then personnally went out at the head of another reconnaissance group. Upon reaching the stadium he was fatally hit by enemy sniper fire from nearby civilian



What remains of the Market at Kien Hoa



houses. It was 5 o'clock in the morning.

At 10 o'clock the 3/10 and 4/10 Battalions reached the city and successfully cleared the administrative and military areas from enemy pressure.

The 4/10 Battalion, commanded by Maj. Nguyen Duc Kim, killed more than 50 Communists at the provincial hospital area.

The government forces however could not reach the city's commercial quarters where enemy firepower was extremely heavy. Meanwhile, the attackers tried hard to capture the local radio but failed in their attempt because of fierce resistance by a squad of government soldiers defending the station.

US reinforcements arrived in the afternoon, and continued to arrive the next morning bringing the number of American troops in the city to two full battalions. Both battalions belonged to to the 2nd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division.

Combined US - Vietnamese operations throughout the day finally drove the enemy from the city and part of the suburbs.

During the following days, continued allied operations supported by air strikes forced the Communists to withdraw completely.

About 2,000 Communist soldiers had taken part in the battle. They belonged to two newly formed battalions (the 3rd and the 4th), two regional companies, and local guerrilla units.

On our side the following units were involved in the battle :

- Two battalions of the 10th Infantry Division;
- One reconnaissance company at 40% strength;
- 200 police and regional force men and 4 armored vehicles at the Sector Command;
- One artillery platoon with two 155mm How. stationed at the airfield;
- One crew of 105mm How. at the local stadium.

Casualties on our side were 100 soldiers and 90 civilians. Over 50% of the town's civilian houses were damaged. The Truc Giang market was burned down.

The enemy suffered 300 killed and lost 100 weapons of various kinds.

Vinh Long

The enemy was almost 100 per cent sure he would win in Vinh Long as up to 3 Communist battalions had infiltrated into the city to prepare for the offensive at a time when both authorities and population were relaxing before Tet celebrations.

But the enemy plan failed to materialize and this again was evidence of his inability to conduct open conventional warfare. That he decided to attack a city openly was a senseless action on his part.

As far as the defenders were concerned quick reaction against a surprise assault and efficient air intervention were instrumental in defeating the enemy's thrust. But what actually encouraged the soldiers most although they were outnumbered by a modernly-equipped enemy was the enthusiastic support they received from the population which displayed a clear-cut anti-communist attitude.

PHASE ONE :

Three enemy battalions were launched into the battle of Vinh Long; the 306th and 308th main-force battalions and the 857th mobile battalion. Most of the soldiers of these three battalions managed to infiltrate into the city days before Tet disguised as civilians. According to some reports a number of Communist soldiers even posed as students of the Tong Phuoc Hiep and Nguyen Truong To schools arriving in the city for a year end meeting on the eve of Tet.

The infiltrators were scattered throughout the city mostly near the local prison. Apparently they had the intention of liberating the detainees as soon as the offensive began.

The Communists planned to occupy the residential and commercial areas first then to encircle and attack the city's main government buildings. After taking complete control of the city they would organize a new administration with their own political cadre.

On our side military personnel on duty were at 30 per cent strength the remainder being on leave for the Tet holidays. On combat positions at the Sector Command were a company and three commando cars.

The enemy offensive began at 3 o'clock in the morning of the 2nd day of Tet with a barrage of 82mm mortar rounds fired into the provincial administrative building, the Sector Command headquarters and the military airfield. Those Communist soldiers who had infiltrated into town then opened fire at the local prison, the administrative building and the military airfield. At the same time, other Communist troops moved in from the city's outskirts toward the same targets.

The Reds planned to take over the local prison and liberate the 844 Communist prisoners being detained there and who would join the attacking force.

Quick reaction by government troops prevented the attackers from attaining their goals, although at some places the Communists had almost entered the defense line and were repelled by hand grenades thrown from inside. The enemy kept firing from surrounding civilian houses. Their gun positions were destroyed one by one by government troops using M79 grenade launchers.

The heaviest enemy attack was against the prison. The Sector Command had to dispatch two commando cars with two accompanying squads to reinforce the compound's defenders. With their accurate machinegun fire they were able to take control of the situation for a while before both commando cars were hit by enemy rockets and destroyed. However, as daylight came the enemy withdrew into surrounding houses.

At the provincial administrative building the enemy attack began with a barrage of B.40 rockets followed by a wave of ground assault troops. Two heavy machineguns firing from a building rooftop near the Mieu Ba temple supported the attack and prevented reinforcements from the Sector command from reaching the scene.

Government troops put up fierce resistance from their solid bunkers inside the compound. Many Communists were seen lying on the street either killed or badly wounded. This forced the enemy to give up the attack and take defensive positions.

At the airfield the attacking force was completely destroyed. Immediately upon their first wave of assault helicopter gunships intervened and killed all the attackers. A second wave met with the same fate. As a result of their suicidal action which lasted only 10 minutes 70 Communists were killed on the airfield's barbed wire.

In the meantime, four enemy companies crossed the Co Chien River and took positions at the Ben Da pier, the market place and a number of public offices and schools, preventing the population from fleeing the area.

On the morning of the 2nd day of Tet government reinforcements arrived from the Corps Command and a counter offensive was launched which soon cleared both the administrative building and the prison areas from enemy pressure. At the same time an enemy attempt to stage a demonstration with people being gathered by force from the Ben Da and Gia Long areas was disbanded by government troops. The Gia Long area and part of the fish market were burned as a result of the fighting.

The next day search and destroy operations were conducted by government troops from house to house. Enemy snipers firing from rooftops were eliminated one by one.

Air support was called in to help clear several areas such as Ly Thai To, Phan Thanh Gian and the public servants residential quarters.

On the 4th day of Tet with new government reinforcements arriving on the scene enemy forces were completely driven out of the city. The battle of Vinh Long ended on the 6th day of Tet.

PHASE TWO :

On the night of February 14 the enemy launched a new attack against Vinh Long with the same units freshly replenished.

Their plan was as follows :

- The 306th Battalion infiltrated into the city from the West was to take over the stadium and the whole western part of the city;

- The 308th Battalion infiltrated from the South and reinforced by two companies from the 857th Battalion was to occupy the provincial administrative office building, the local prison and the Sector command headquarters.

- The 857th Battalion as a reserve force was to take positions along Tong Doc Phuong street to check the arrival of government reinforcements. The Communists failed to reach their goals as

they met with heavy fire from the city defenders stationed on rooftops and in bunkers at street intersections across the city. They however succeeded in reaching the commercial area.

Government troops launched their counter offensive the next morning and recovered full control of the city two days later.

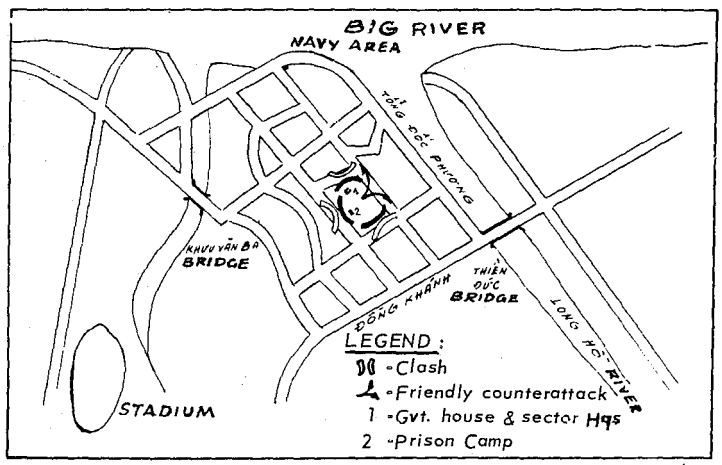
Both offensive phases cost the enemy 300 soldiers killed, 200 individual and 20 crew-served weapons captured.

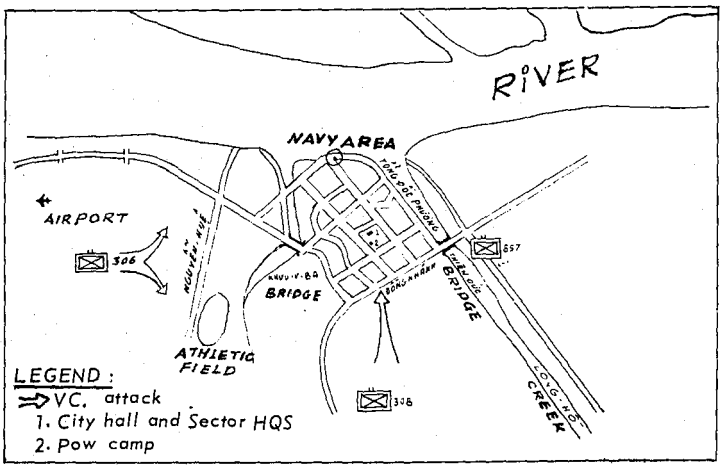
Government casualties were 30 dead. In addition, 200 civilians were killed or wounded 4,500 houses were completely destroyed and 1,850 were damaged.

A number of refugee centers were set up by the provincial authorities at Vinh Liem street, the province's main church, the School of Pedagogy, the primary schools for boys and girls, the kindergarten, and the Chua Ong pagoda.

VC. ATTACK IN VINH LONG

(PHASE 1)





VC. ATTACKS IN VINH LONG

(PHASE 2)

CHAPTER III

HOW THE VIET CONG PLANNED THEIR GENERAL OFFENSIVE AND GENERAL UPRISING ?

In preparation for their general offensive and general uprising, the Viet Cong started revamping their structure and reforming their activities as early as in the second half of 1967. This included reorganization of military areas, redeployment of combat units, increased infiltration of men and weapons, modernization of armament and special training on street fighting.

A.- REORGANIZATION OF MILITARY AREAS

Before the Tet Mau Than offensive Communist military areas in South Vietnam were divided into 8 Zones and 1 Special Zone as follows :

- Zone Tri-Thien-Hue comprising Quang Tri and Thua Thien province;
- Zone 5 including the provinces of Quang Da, Quang Nam, Kontum, Quang Ngai, Gia Lai (Pleiku), Binh Dinh, Dak Lak (Darlac), Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa.
- Zone 6 composed of Tuyen Duc, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan and Lam Dong provinces.
- Zone 10 with Quang Duc, Phuoc Long and Binh Long provinces.
- Zone 1 comprising Tay Ninh, Thu Dau Mot and Ba Bien (Ba Ria and Bien Hoa).
- Zone 4 including Saigon - Cholon and Gia Dinh province and parts of Bien Hoa, Hau Nghia, Long An and Binh Duong provinces.
- 'Rung Sat' Special Zone consisting of the Rung Sat forest.
- Zone 2 made up by the provinces of An Giang, Kien Phong, Kien Tuong, Long An, My Tho and Ben Tre.
- Zone 3 with Rach Gia, Vinh Long, Can Tho, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang and Ca Mau provinces (1)

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(1) Several names of provinces are not mentioned in the Viet Cong military zones as one VC province often is comprised of 2 RVN provinces. For example : the Communists' An Giang province includes Chau Doc, Binh Thuan province includes Binh Tuy, while both their Can Tho and Rach Gia include our Chuong Thien.

The Communist military zones were defined on a geographical basis for command and logistics reasons. Most of the zones stretch along the border and the coast to move supplies easier from the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the neigboring countries and the sea. Usually under each zone command was a hierarchy of province, district and village commissioners. Zone 4 in particular had no provincial commissioners whose job was assumed by the zone command itself.

In view of their general offensive and general uprising the Communists in the III Corps Area decided to disband Zone I in the eastern area, Zone 4 (Saigon - Gia Dinh) and part of Zone 2 and reorganize them into 10 sub-zones which included 5 sub-zones in charge of the 5 army wings encircling Saigon. The reorganization was completed early in November 1967. The territories of the 5 sub-zones encircling Saigon included : Saigon city, Cholon, Gia Dinh (the former Zone 4) and the connected provinces of Long An, Hau-Nghia, Binh Duong and Bien Hoa. These sub-zones were placed under the direct command of :

the Central Office of South Vietnam had been set up as refuge and logistics bases for the offensive against the capital. They included :

- Sub-zone 1 north of Saigon with the Boi Loi and Bung Cong areas as base for operations toward the northern part of Saigon.

- Sub-zone 2 to the west and southwest of Saigon with the Vam Co Dong area as base for operations toward Ba Queo, the western part of Saigon and the Phu Lam area.

- Sub-zone 3 to the south with the southeast part of Ben Luc and the Nha Be river as base for operations against Saigon's "Y" Bridge and Khanh Hoi areas.

- Sub-zone 4 to the east of the capital with the Giong Ong To and Hiep Binh areas as base for operations toward the Highway and Binh Loi bridges.

- Sub-zone 5, northeast of Saigon, with the northwest part of Tan Uyen as base for operations toward the west of Thu Duc or the Highway and Binh Loi bridges through the Bung intersections and Hiep Binh village.

As far as the I Corps area was concerned it was

regarded as of prime importance both strategically and tactically by the Communists because it is adjacent to North Vietnam whose front-line is in the South. The Tri Thien area, furthermore, serves as supply channel from the North to the South. Consequently, to the Communists, the city of Hue is just as vital as Saigon from both military and political points of view.

At the same time as their military areas in the III Corps were reorganized, the Communists also revamped their Tri Thien Zone into four areas, each forming a battlefront in the same way as the sub-zones in the III Corps. The Tri-Thien-Hue zone had formed until then two distinct fronts, one called B5 front running from Highway 9 to the North, and one called B7 from Highway 9 toward Hue.

As Hue had been the hotbed of several anti-government movements, and a Communist victory there would entail significant developments, the enemy decided to form two other fronts, one running from Thua Thien to Hue and the other from south of Thua Thien and Phu Loc to the Hai Van Pass.

The four fronts were established by May, 1967 with special assignments to a total of 50 Communist battalions, under combined commands in preparation for the general offensive. Territorial components of the four areas were as follows :

- Area I : Gio Linh, Cam Lo, North Hung Hoa, Hy Lap.
- Area II : Trieu Phong, Hai Lang, Quang Ha city.
- Area III : Huong Thuy, Phu Vang, Huong Tra, Quang Dien, Phong Dien (Hue area).
- Area IV : Phu Loc (South of Hue vicinity of Hai Van Pass).

This shows that any reform, territorial or otherwise, made by the Communists implies serious planning for action, and that their general offensive of 1968 had been prepared since mid-1967 with Saigon and Hue as the two main targets.

During the 26 days of fighting in Hue they were able to set up a revolutionary administration with the so-called Alliance of Democratic and Peaceful Forces. The Communists considered this as a major political victory that could serve as a pattern for future attacks against the cities. Although the battle of Hue was characterized by a relatively strong, combined US - Vietnamese force which included the US 1st Marine Division, 1st Airborne Division, and the RVN 1st

Infantry Division. The Communists were able to control the city for 26 days. Was this the result of their military territorial reorganization, which enabled the enemy to attack with equal strength on all fronts, and to launch a direct assault against Hue while retaining the US Marines at Khe Sanh ?

The same pattern was seen in the Saigon area, although here the enemy failed in his attempt to foment a popular uprising, their five attacking forces coming from the five zones around Saigon were nonetheless able to penetrate the capital city before the offensive was repelled.

That they could reach the city's suburbs without encountering any resistance was due to the fact that our villages around the capital had not been well defended, and the cause of this defective defense system came from the territorial organization itself :

In 1956 the Saigon military district included four sectors; Tay Ninh, Cholon, Gia Dinh and the capital city. By the end of 1956, the reorganized capital military district comprised Saigon, Cholon and the provinces of Gia Dinh and Long An.

Early in 1961, when the country was divided into four Corps Areas, the capital military district was transformed into the Capital Special Zone and reduced to Saigon and Gia Dinh province only.

By the end of 1965 the Capital Special Zone was renamed again to the Capital Military district with the same territories plus the Con Son special zone.

Since July 18, 1966, with the same territories, it was changed to the Special Zone and placed under the direct command of the III Corps with the responsib lities and prerogatives of a tactical zone and no longer under direct command of the General Staff as before. This organization still prevailed at the time of the 1968 Communist general offensive.

The RVN and Communist military territorial organizations thus can be described as entirely different from each other. It was not known whether our military auth rities at the time, when defining our various military areas, had taken into account the enemy situation, since the villages around the capital as well as a number of towns across the city happened to be heavily infiltrated by the Communists. No countermeasures had been taken on our part.

Before 1954, security belts of our townships had been well organized. The Viet Minh delegation to the 1954 Geneva Conference had to admit that the country's cities and their surrounding areas were under nationalist control.

Only after the Communist Tet offensive against the cities including the capital, where the enemy had been able to infiltrate without difficulties, did we realize that the areas adjacent to cities and townships were of much interest to the enemy. The question that could be asked then was whether the military territorial organization of the Special Zone had been logical and appropriate. Since emphasis on security matters was within the zone's perimeter and operational matters around the city were entrusted to the Gia Dinh Sector. The fact that the Special Zone was also in charge of the Con Son area furthermore indicated that emphasis in the organization of the Zone had been placed on management rather than initiative defense.

B. - REVAMPING OF COMBAT UNITS

Before their 1968 general offensive, the various Communist commands in the I Corps Area, including the Command of the 324B Division, were disbanded and revamped into "Groups" of regiment level.

Before April 1967, enemy forces in the Tri-Thien-Hue military zone included the CT4, CT5 and CT6 Regiments, the 802nd and 804th mobile battalions, the D12 sappers battalion and a number of city units.

In April 1967, these were reinforced by two more battalions belonging to the 9/309A Regiment newly infiltrated into the South.

During May 1967, while reorganizing their military areas into 4 fronts, the Communists revamped their forces into "Groups" after disbanding the various commands including the commands of the 324B Division and the 803rd, 812th and 90th Regiments.

In July 1967, seven enemy worksite regiments were formed in the area. Beginning in August 1967 these were called "Groups"

Why this new name ? "Group" means a mixed force of regiment or combat group level, operating on its own. Each group

is organized according to the needs of the battle front to which it is assigned. Usually, one group consists of : 3 infantry battalions, one sapper battalion, one artillery battalion, one supporting battalion, 8 or 9 specialized companies like the specialized units in an infantry regiment, reinforcing elements such as a ranger unit, a worker unit and vanguard youth elements (depending on each battle front), and special organization for arms production, health, liaison and post-office.

When the Communist general offensive began, 13 enemy groups had been set up, numbered from 1 to 13. Their assignments were as follows :

Combat : Groups 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9.
Support artillery : Group 12.
Logistics and Reserve : Groups 1, 3, 8 and 10.
Sapper action in the city : Group 11 (Hue city unit)

In addition, Group 559 was in charge of logistics for all battle fronts in I Corps.

Only Groups 5 and 6 plus part of Group 9 were involved in the Communist attack against Hue. In the face of fierce resistance and counter offensive by government troops backed by heavy air raids, they had to withdraw after three weeks of fighting and as their nation-wide general offensive campaign had failed.

As far as Saigon was concerned, the attacking force was no less sizeable. Three Communist divisions and many regional units were deployed near the capital city or at about two days walk from it. According to confirmed intelligence reports, the enemy force consisted of Worksite 9 (a Worksite unit is similar to a division) composed of the Q761, Q762 and Q763 Regiments based in the Hoc Mon - Thu Duc area; Worksite 7 composed of the 165th, 141st and 101st Regiments stationed in the Lai Khe - Binh Duong area; Worksite 5 composed of the 274th and 275th Regiments operating in Bien Hoa; the independent Dong Nai Regiment on the Binh Duong - Bien Hoa border; the 267th and 269th Battalions belonging to the main force of Sub-Zone 2 in Gia Dinh; and the F.40 Sapper Battalion in Saigon - Gia Dinh.

In addition, there were a number of regional units such as the 506th Battalion in Hau Nghia, the 508th Battalion in Gia Dinh, the Phu Loi Battalion in Binh Duong, the 2nd Battalion in Go

Mon and Go Vap, the 3rd Battalion at Di An, the 4th Battalion in Thu Duc, the 5th Battalion at Nha Be, and the 6th Battalion at Binh Tan. These were supported by a number of mobile artillery units.

In total, more than 40 infantry battalions and a number of support unit involving more than 20,000 men (1), 18,000 of them were regular troops and the remainder regional troops who were deployed around the capital city.

Only thirteen infantry battalions were involved in the first round of the Communist offensive. Committed to the second round were 15 to 17 battalions, with the remainder of the enemy force keeping pressure on the city.

The enemy was able to maintain pressure because the defense system in the hamlets and villages around the capital had been inadequate. The Communists could move in and out of the hamlets and villages without being discovered. By mid-1967, assassinations and other acts of terrorism by the enemy often occured in the Go Vap area, a suburb of Saigon City. Perhaps it was the last area in the city's outskirts where the defense system was still solid thereby forcing the Communist to intensify their terrorist activity to completely destroy the infrastructure. Also by the end of 1967, enemy infiltrators were seen in action in the Phu Lam - Cholon area where they would attack a police post or check vehicles in some streets for a few hours and withdraw before national police arrived. Life would return to normal after such incidents as if nothing had really happened. An apparent security still prevailed although enemy soldiers had reached the doors of the city.

The concentration and development of the enemy forces around the capital was stepped up during the same second half of 1967 when the military situation across the country appeared quiet with military authorities inclined to believe that the enemy no longer had the capability for major drives at the battalion level.

Although some big battles by regimental size units were initiated by the enemy in the course of 1967, they all ended in Communist defeats and heavy losses. These were the Con Tien battle which started in June and ended in July, the Loc Ninh battle in October and November, and the Dak To battle in November.

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(1) Each enemy battalion has from 300 to 400 men. A Communist regiment has more than 1,000 men, a worksite from 5,000 to 6,000 men.

Optimistic observers maintained that the battle of Con Tien lasted nearly 3 months because the enemy's rear consisted of a border sanctuary from where they could launch infantry or artillery attacks against allied positions at Con Tien, only 12 kilometers from the Laotian border and 8 kilometers from the Ben Hai River.

Similar conditions prevailed at Loc Ninh, only 14 kilometers from the Cambodian border. The enemy attack against Loc Ninh was mainly aimed at creating a psychological impact on world public opinion while the attacking forces could withdraw into safety across the border.

The Dak To front also was seen as having the same characteristics as it was on the Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia border area.

The same observers would conclude that all the enemy attacks were desperate military attempts aimed only at influencing world opinion, without significant success however.

To be more objective, we should take into consideration the fact that, starting from June 1967, the Communists worked hard on the revamping and redeployment of their forces in preparation for their 1968 general offensive. The enemy attacks in late 1967 therefore could be described as battle ground testing actions with different tactical characteristics. At Con Tien, for example, the enemy installed their artillery units in artificial caves dug in mountain slopes. They would pull them out for sudden barrages against allied positions and push them back into the caves as soon as the barrages ended to avoid allied counter fire and air strikes. In the meantime, their infantry troops would advance into Con Tien through converging trenches. They kept fighting while digging and seldom emerged above the ground level. The attack was similar to Dien Bien Phu which they wanted to repeat with the attacking troops advancing through multiple trenches. But in the face of an allied airforce twenty times more powerful than the French airforce in 1954 and a counterattack from outside the base by our infantry elements in September 1967, the Communist 324B Division finally had to withdraw from Con Tien.

At Loc Ninh and later on at Phuoc Qua, the Reds launched their attacks with the hope of luring our troops into a selected battle ground near the border which could only be advantageous to them. They were using a new tactic which they called "three attacks,

three points" (1). With this tactic, the enemy launched flame throwers from more than one side into the Loc Ninh post and the district headquarters as well, burning down the whole compound and its defense structure. Only an underground fortress, built by the Japanese during World War II was able to resist until reinforcements arrived the next morning. The Communists then tried hard to maintain their pressure on the post while hitting at the newly arrived reinforcements (cong don da vien), using many antiaircraft guns. But they were finally defeated by the numerous reinforcements with a powerful air support and operating on a relatively flat battlefield.

The battle of Dak To also had the characteristics of a selected battleground almost similar to the Plei Mei battle on the highlands in October 1965. There was a difference however : while at Plei Mei enemy forces withdrew in complete disorder and suffered heavy losses as they went. They were pursued by the US First Air Cavalry Division up to the Chu Phong mountain. Well organized resistance positions were set up by the enemy at Dak To and throughout the battlefield to check the allied pursuit operations. As a result bloody battles were fought and our forces were only able to take control of the battlefield after suffering heavy casualties (2).

The enemy initiated battles of late 1967 therefore could be described as testing actions through which the enemy weighed its own forces while diverting allied troops toward the border area with the cities being left without proper defense.

C. - INCREASING INFILTRATION OF ARMS AND MEN

In preparation for their general offensive, the Communits also increased their infiltration of arms and men into the South.

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(1) The "ba cong ba mui" (three attacks, three points)tactics actually does not differ much from the "nhat diem luong dien" (one primary objective with two secondary objectives) tactics because in the battle of Loc Ninh the enemy launched three simultaneous attacks against the post while the "nhat diem luong dien" tactics would consist of one major thrust against the weakest target with the two "dien" being diversion and support.

(2) The battle of Plei Mei lasted more than a month during which time 6,000 enemy soldiers were killed. The battle of Dak To lasted 22 days, and both sides suffered casualties, with the heavier losses on the Communist side.

All signs had been in favor of the RVN since; the arrival of American troops in Vietnam on February 7, 1965, followed by successive operations which destroyed much of the enemy's strength, and by the escalation of air raids against the North.

Some observers would think that the increased enemy infiltrations had only enabled the Communists to station their regular forces along the borders in support of their guerrilla and popular forces who were waging a terror war in rural areas in an attempt to destroy the RVN pacification program.

Enemy infiltration of arms and men from North Vietnam into the South actually started at a relatively low rate in 1961.

It took the Communists two years to establish their infiltration channels.

There were about 3,700 men infiltrated into the South during 1961. This figure went up to 5,400 in 1962, down to 4,200 in 1963, and up again to reach the 7,000 mark in 1964. This means that from 1959 to 1964, a total of 20,000 men were infiltrated into the South. These included officers, servicemen and specialized cadre. Most of these men were Southerners who had been regrouped in the North after the Geneva Agreement. They were sent back to the South to strengthen the developing Viet Cong forces.

The intervention of US troops in 1965 prompted North Vietnam to change their plan. In Autumn 1965, Hanoi decided to send south entire regular regiments. Up to the end of 1964 only one North Vietnamese division had infiltrated into the South and was concentrated in the Kontum area. The division had the mission of taking over the Highland and making it the Capital of the National Liberation Front.

By Autumn-Winter 1965, after nearly half a year of no action following the arrival of American troops and the escalation of air raids against North Vietnam the Communists started some attacks at regimental level and higher. Typical of these attacks was the battle of Ba Gia in Quang Ngai and the battle of Plei Mei in the Highland. All these attacks failed, causing much confusion among the Viet Cong ranks.

In the course of 1955-1956, combined ARVN and allied troops launched many operations into VC strategic and secret zones, causing heavy casualties to the enemy. The VC strength was conse-

quently reduced from 70,000 regular men to 35,000 or 36,000. Hanoi had to maintain a high infiltration rate to replenish the Communist forces in the South.

In 1967, an average of 7,000 men infiltrated from North Vietnam into the South each month. The figure for January 1968 only rose to 22,000 men. It went down to 15,000 men in February 1968 and rose again during the following months.

By the end of 1967, there were 95,000 North Vietnamese troops in the South.

The Viet Cong, who had had recruiting problems since early 1967, were able to recruit only 3,500 men each month during 1967 as compared with 7,500 men each month in 1966.

Before the general offensive of Tet Mau Than, the enemy strength was estimated at 325,000 men including 147,200 belonging to combat and guerilla units. There were at least 79,000 North Vietnamese soldiers belonging to purely North Vietnamese units, and 16,000 North Vietnamese in the so-called Viet Cong ranks. In reality, 75% of the enemy combat regiments were North Vietnamese. This figure could even be higher.

In the meantime, enemy efforts were being made toward the formation of a number of regional units.

The enemy had 129,200 combat and guerilla soldiers before the general offensive and 147,000 when the offensive started. These belonged to 10 divisions (instead of 9 before the offensive), 52 regiments (instead of 45 before the offensive) and 274 battalions (instead of 230 before the offensive).

Thus, the entire military strength of North Vietnam was deployed into the South through infiltration in the course of 1967. Communist returnees from the VC 308th and 320th Divisions at Cam Lo (Quang Tri) on January 26, 1968 revealed that only 3 or 4 divisions stayed behind in North Vietnam and these were composed of youths in military service. Documents published in Hanoi showed that by the end of 1967, North Vietnam's potential military manpower was 3,200,000 including all male citizens from 18 to 45 years old. Half of this number was used in military, para-military and civilian activities as follows : 425,000 men in the regular forces (including those on duty in the South); 230,000 men in the security force; 160,000 dead; 1,000,000 in the popular and public service force,

making a total of 1,815,000 men. The remaining 1,400,000 men were serving in other branches of activity.

This means that if North Vietnam elected to send South all young men from 18 to 25, the infiltration figure could reach 350,000.

$$(1,400,000 \times \frac{7 \text{ year groups } 18\text{-}25}{28 \text{ year groups } 18\text{-}45} : 350,000)$$

Such a military buildup in the South, however, would jeopardize the economy in the North and would create huge logistical problems. It would also cause resentment among Communist South Vietnamese cadres because of its being entirely North Vietnamese.

As a matter of fact, enemy units involved in the Tet offensive already were composed mostly of North Vietnamese soldiers. They were all young men, many still under 14 or 15. They had been infiltrated into the South for a few months and had never participated in any battle before.

While increasing their infiltration of men into the South, the North Vietnamese also sought to modernize the weaponry of the Communist forces in the South, beginning late in 1967. Arms and ammunition were continuously sent South through the Ho Chi Minh trail and by sea.

During the last three months of 1967, the Communists infiltrated into South Vietnam from 107 to 320 tons of military equipment per day. By mid-1967, North Vietnamese trucks were seen at the three-border area, while at sea the enemy used 100-ton boats or motored boats disguised as foreign fishing vessels to transport their arms. These boats would navigate in international waters and reach secret ports on the South Vietnamese coast at night. Their transportation system was faultless thanks to a well organized liaison and information network that had been set up throughout the military areas. The system consists of liaison stations installed along the infiltration routes, at intervals of 4 to 8 hours walk depending on the length of each route segment and its dangers. Several stations on the same route are called a liaison line. Connected lines form the enemy's liaison network across South Vietnam. Personnel at each station consists of two to four agents depending on its importance and headed by a chief of station. The stations and their transportation of arms and equipment were seldom discovered. It has to be noted that the enemy's liaison and information system was thoroughly reorganized in the course of 1967 probably as part of the general offensive plan.



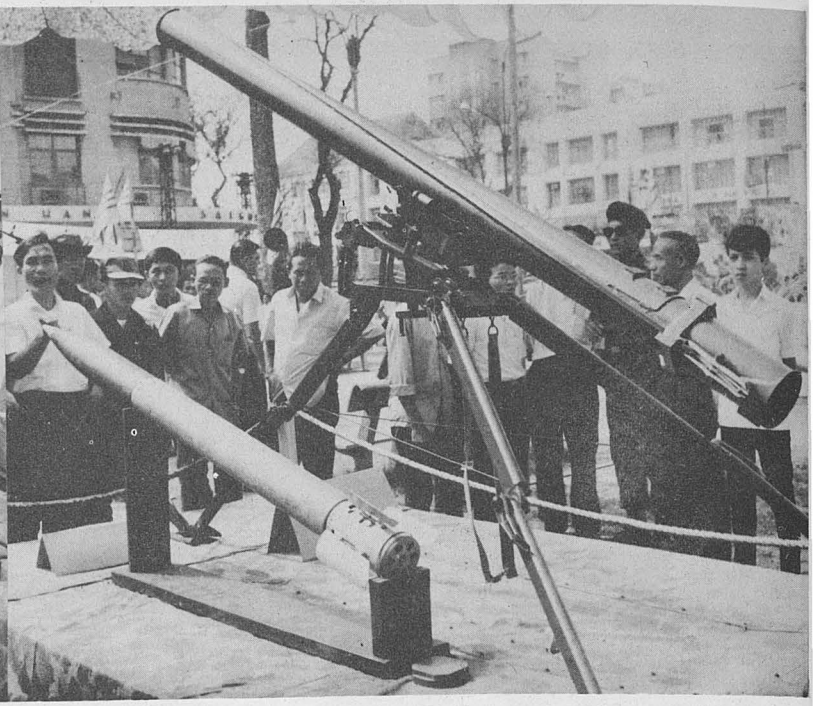
What a 122mm rocket can do .



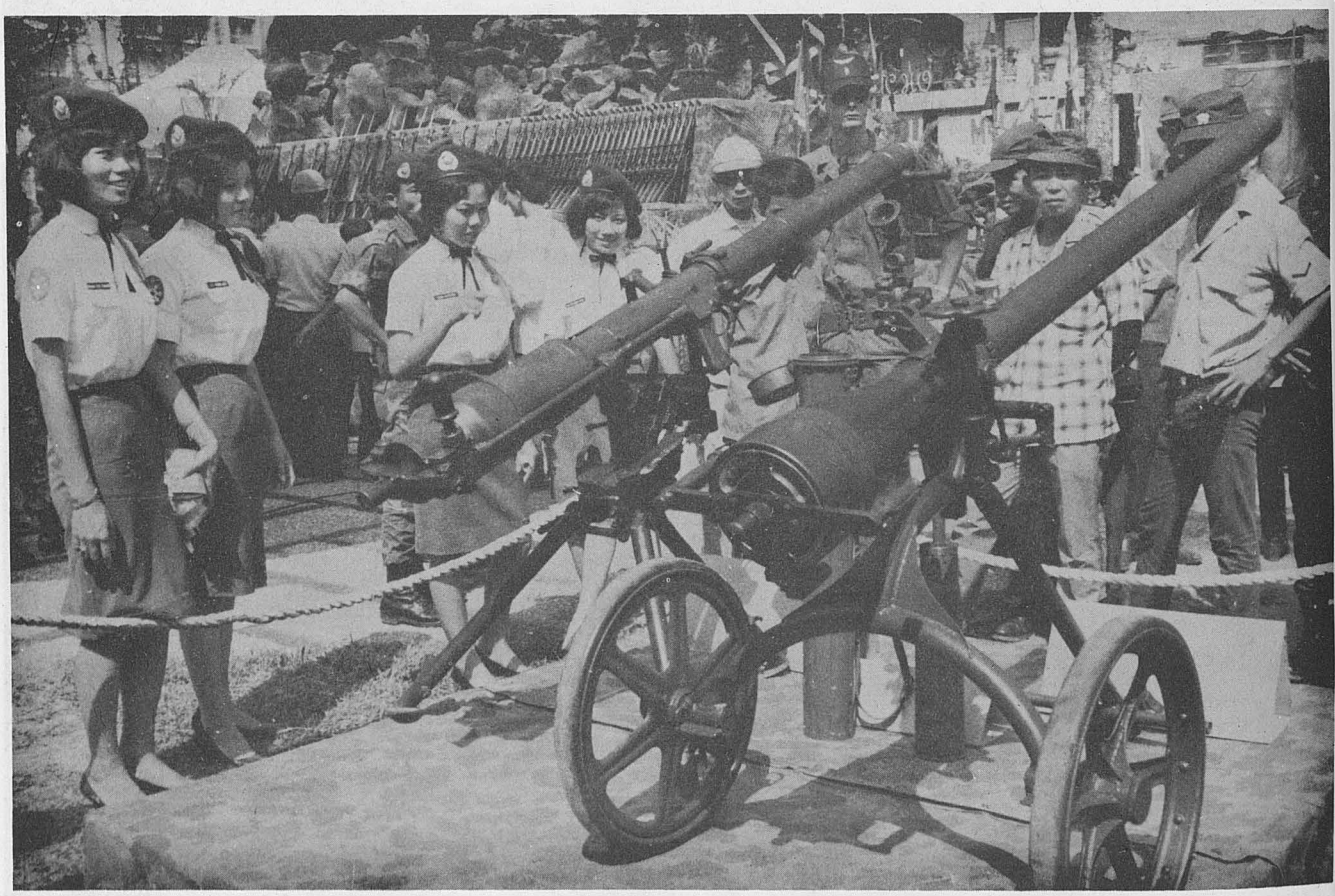
A 122mm rocket after explosion



12. 7mm machineguns manufactured in Communist China were used again allied planes.



122mm rocket and its launching pad.



Two types of recoilless rifles produced in Communist China: the 75mm and the 57mm recoilless rifles.





View of the exhibition of VC arms and equipment following their "Tet" offensive. Rifles with bayonet are the famous AK automatic rifles.

D. - MODERNIZATION OF WEAPONRY FOR THE COMBAT FORCES

The modernization of the Communist weaponry in South Vietnam was carried out in several phases. First in 1959 when they re-launched their military drive for a Communist take over in South Vietnam the Viet Cong were using arms left over from the resistance war against the French.

Later, they used arms captured from RVN forces. However they could not rely only on captured arms and ammunition as the war developed, for they needed modern weapons to modernize and expand their armed forces now deploying as larger units.

By mid-1967, arms made in various Communist countries were introduced into South Vietnam by the Viet Cong. A government document showed that from mid-1962 to 1965, more than twenty different kinds of Communist weapons were seized as follows :

No	CATEGORY	ORIGIN	DATE OF CAPTURE	LOCATION
1	MP-82 Rifle	Russia	10.5.1962	Binh Dinh
2	57 mm Recoilless rifle	Com. China	25.11.1962	Quang Tin
3	K. 50 Sub-machinegun	-id-	-id-	-id-
4	60 mm Mortar	-id-	7.1.1963	Phuoc Thanh
5	82 mm Mortar	-id-	25.3.1963	Tay Ninh
6	MP-82 Rocket	Czechoslovakia	24.4.1963	Quang Ngai
7	27 mm Rocket launcher	Com. China	10.6.1963	-id-
8	Mossin Nagant Carbin with automatic bayonet (CKC)	Russia	13.6.1963	Kien Phong
9	SKS 7.62 mm Carbin	-id-	10.9.1963	An Xuyen
10	75 mm Recoilless rifle	Com. China	-id-	-id-
11	7.92 mm Heavy machinegun (8 Maxin)	-id-	-id-	-id-
12	7.92 mm Carbin	-id-	15.9.1963	Dinh Tuong
13	12 mm Heavy machinegun	-id-	24.11.1963	Duc Hoa
14	Transformed Mat 49	North Vietnam	25.11.1963	Quang Tin
15	90 mm Bazooka	Com. China	22.12.1963	Dinh Tuong
16	90 mm Rocket launcher	East Germany	16.2.1965	Vung Ro
17	53 type Carbin	-id-	-id-	-id-
18	7.92 mm Sub-machinegun	-id-	12.1964	Chuong Thien
19	7.92 mm Mauser	-id-	16.2.1965	Vung Ro
20	12.7 mm anti-aircraft heavy machinegun, 54 type	Com. China	15.12.1965	Quang Ngai
21	RP46 Automatic Rifle	Russia	15.12.1965	Quang Ngai
22	RPD Machinegun	-id-	-id-	-id-
23	RPG-2 anti-tank gun; Russian type, and Communist Chinese type known as B.40	Com. China	-id-	-id-

From the beginning of 1966 to the end of 1967, other kinds of Communist weapons were introduced into South Vietnam but the enemy infantry forces were mainly equipped with weapons as listed above, plus some obsolete ones. Only VC guerilla and regional units still used weapons captured from government forces.

During the Communist general offensive of 1968, it could be noticed that the enemy had discarded all kinds of weapons considered as obsolete and only those with a strong fire power were being used, particularly in the attacks against cities and townships. These were :

- RPG-2 anti-tank guns made in Communist China and known as B.40 and B.41;
- AK.47 and 50 sub-machineguns manufactured in Communist China.

Both are light and easy to handle, with a strong destructive power. Their caracteristics are as follows :

The RPG-2 anti-tank gun was first manufactured by the German Nazis during World War II. It was perfectioned by Communist China into the B.40 rocket gun, and the more modern B.41. This arm was introduced into South Vietnam for the first time in late 1965 when it was captured by government troops in the Don Pho Trang battle in Quang Ngai. The first B.40 rocket fired in the 1968 general offensive was at the Khe Sanh outpost on 20 January 1968. It made headlines in local newspapers which claimed that a new enemy weapon was able to fire through sand bags. During the Communist offensive against cities and townships, a number of government tanks, bunkers and buildings were destroyed by B.40 rockets.

The RPG-2, is very light and easy to carry, and has a strong destructive power. With it one man can destroy an armored vehicle. During World War II, each Soviet platoon was equipped with one such weapon. When it was first manufactured, it could not be used more than once. It was perfect by the Communist Chinese who made it capable of repeated firing. The RPG-2 gun weighs 2.750 kilograms while its rocket's weight is 1.840 kilogram. Its range is 150 meters, and the harder the target, the more destructive its power.

The AK sub-machinegun was also first manufactured by Germany during World War II. It is an automatic and semi-automatic individual weapon used by Soviet and other Communist

forces. The AK50 was introduced into South Vietnam by the end of 1962 when it was captured by government forces in Phuoc Chau, Quang Tin. Its sharp bayonet can cut barbed wire and dig small holes. The more modern AK 47 was manufactured to replace the AK 50 as well as the semi-automatic SKS carbin. The AK 47 weighs 4.800 kilograms including its ammunition, and has a range of 400 meters while the AK 50 weighs 5.450 kilograms with a range of only 200 meters. Each soldier can carry up to 400 rounds with each magazine containing 30 to 35 rounds. Both types of AK were used by the Viet Cong in the general offensive. The AK firepower is considered equal to the American M.16.

Like the Soviet forces in World War II, each Viet Cong assault platoon involved in the general offensive was equipped with one or two B.40 or B.41 while platoon members were individually armed with AK guns for either sporadic or uninterrupted firing.

The modernization of VC weaponry should have been begun years ago since before it could be carried out it required long periods of time for solliciting modern arms supplies from Communist countries, transporting them into South Vietnam through North Vietnam, and for training personnel in handling them.

In addition to infantry weapons, heavy artillery guns, particularly the 122 mm rocket, were also used by the enemy in their offensive against the cities.

Some Communist Chinese 107 mm rockets were also fired into the capital city in May 1968. This rocket weighs 26 kilograms and is less efficient than the 122 mm. The 107 mm rocket had been supplied to North Vietnam by Communist China since September 1967, but it did not appear on the battlefield in the South until 9 months later.

The modernization of enemy weaponry from a primitive level into one superior to our own fire power in view of a decisive battle was one of the many surprises of the Vietnam war (1)

Why the delay in modernizing the ARVN forces ?

High-ranking US military authorities in Vietnam blamed the White House and the civilian authorities at the Pentagon for the slow process. They put forward the following arguments :

- From 1961, Washington had believed that the RVN forces were not willing to fight and supplies of new weapons would

in the end go to the enemy and constitute a waste of money;

- Washington had planned no surplus of arms when the war is over only upon seeing the determination for combat of the RVN forces in the course of the Communist Tet offensive did Washington realize that RVN troops were real soldiers.

It was not until 11 April 1968 that US Defense Secretary Clark Clifford announce the beginning of the modernization of RVN troops to match the enemy's modern equipment which included light weapons, rockets, heavy machineguns and mortars (2)

E. - TRAINING IN CITY STREET FIGHTING

Communist documents captured during and after the Tet offensive indicated that enemy troops had been trained for both the method and technique of city street fighting. The enemy training documents had been prepared long before the general offensive, while others were prepared during the offensive in view of subsequent waves of attacks.

The documents placed heavy emphasis on military theory, but only a few dealt with actual experiences gathered in the course of the offensive itself. Tactics cited in the documents concerned infantry units only. There was no mention of other branches such as artillery and rocket.

The documents, however, were more suitable for guerilla warfare than for conventional warfare. They deserve attention as the experiences gathered may lead the Viet Cong to preparing a major military handbook that suits the peculiarities of the Vietnam war.

In bringing the war into the cities, the Communists entered what they called the "total war" phase, characterized by a

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(1) During the Communist Tet Mau Than general offensive, only more than a half of our 10 infantry divisions and marine, airborne and ranger units - the main units of our armed forces - were equipped with the M-16 which they received only a few days before Tet. This was a surprise to the Viet Cong who had expected a less strong fire power on our part. But our units met with some difficulties as they had not been very familiar with the new weapon.

(2) Cf. US. News and World Report, 8 July 1968.

"general offensive" and a "general uprising". Their war policy, which had been "occupy the countryside to encircle the cities", now was changed into "occupy the cities to liberate the countryside". To occupy the cities, of course, means a complete political take-over. The Viet Cong had planned to reach this goal within a relatively short time. According to their documents, the "relatively short time" would be from six months to 2 years.

In accordance with their new strategy of attacks against the cities, the Viet Cong established a program of military training aimed at bringing their troops from rural areas into townships. Highlights of the program included :

1. General : On Two Tactical Fields and the Assignment of Combat Forces.

City fighting tactics :

- Sapper action, disguise and infiltration.
- Secret grouping at night time.
- Concentric advance.
- Raids on mechanized nests, artillery ground firing.
- "Encircling and isolating" tactics.
- Attacking mechanized units in motion within the city, mine attacks.

Combat assignments :

- In-city force
- Force attacking from outside the city
- City "cutting" force
- Reserve force ready for reinforcement on all fronts. This force will become the occupying and defense force when the battle is won.
- Force to intercept government reinforcements.
- "Corridor" force assuring logistical and itinerary tasks.
- Workers force
- Anti-aircraft force, artillery force.
- Sapper force, engineering force accompanying infantry units for sabotage action, or going along with assault units for initial break throughs.

2. Preparing the Offensive : Combat Preparation, Battlefield Preparation, Attack Plans, Means and Equipment.

Combat Preparation :

Depending on the importance of each city target and its defense system, the enemy attacking forces would receive the following assignments : The main force's role was to attack, support, assault, reinforce, and defend occupied positions; the role of the in-city force including military and para-military elements and political organizations, was to receive, guide forces coming from outside, attack from within, help the main force expand to connected areas after taking control of a city, and remain in the city for further underground activity in case of withdrawal of the main force etc... the workers force would accompany the combat units and carry out logistical tasks; the political force composed of leaders of the uprising committee would take over the city administration, with the help of Communist cadres previously disguised as nationalist elements.

Battlefield Preparation :

The preparation was carried out on all three fields : military, political and proselyting.

Offensive Plans :

Each force was supposed to have its own plan with specific mentions of its mission, composition, direction, behavior and other combined directives.

Means and Equipment :

Members of each force should be well trained for the handling of modern weapons including those captured from government troops such as the M.79, M.72 etc. Units trained for sabotage action, mine attack, convoy attack, destruction of buildings and bunkers, should know how to drive a tank or navigate a ship if necessary; reconnaissance teams should be equipped with civilian clothes and ARVN uniforms and insignias; infantry elements should be equipped on the basis of two AK's for one B.40 or B.41, and each soldier, in addition to his own equipment, must carry one B.40 rocket, or a round of 60 mm or 82 mm mortar or DKZ.

3. City combat techniques : Attacks outside and inside the city, attacks on buildings and bunkers, and counter assaults.

Outside-the-city Phase :

This includes circumstances that require no artillery preparation and circumstances that require artillery preparation,

either briefly before the infantry assault or for a specific length of time to destroy the target's defense capability before attack by the infantry elements. Any attack aimed at occupation of a target outside the city should be executed as quickly as possible.

Inside-the-City Phase :

Upon entering the city, the attacking force should immediately occupy high buildings, street intersections and other strategic points, fan out into smaller units capable of combating independently in separate areas, avoid face-to-face attacks to the maximum for flank and rear attacks, and apply the three-to-three tactics for combined assault and sapper actions.

Attacks Against Buildings :

Upon entering a building, the attacking force should divide itself into several cells : one taking positions upstairs, one downstairs, one mounting guard at the entrance, one searching inside the house, using either bayonets or grenades. The guard cell protects the searching cell, the downstairs cell protects the upstairs one. In case of attack by tanks or repression fire power, the cells must support one another in fierce resistance to effect a safe withdrawal.

Occupation of City Bunkers :

City bunkers are to be avoided, but if necessary they should be overrun at all costs.

Counter assault tactics :

The enemy thought that normally our reaction would consist of tanks accompanying infantry elements, with air and artillery support, being launched in repeated small waves and always in the day time. To counter such reaction, the enemy devised the following method : First an intercepting fire barrage, taking full advantage of the defense bunkers, and launching a counter assault in case of heavy casualties on our side. If our reaction involves air and armored support, the enemy would try to occupy vital positions and divide itself into three factions : one facing our force, one intercepting our flank and one pushing into our rear. In case of a reaction involving heliborne troops, the enemy force would split in two : one part dealing with our ground force, the other with the landing force with fire power chiefly aimed at the helicopters and preventing the landing troops from concentrating.

In addition to such methods and techniques in guerilla type attacks against the cities, other parts of the Communist documents dealt with general problems involved in city fighting. These included :

- Plans for infiltration of troops into the city as well as their movements and activities inside the city;

- Guerilla and sapper tactics to create disorder and confusion among the city population before the offensive, and assert the enemy presence after the offensive.

- Organization, command and information plans to improve the enemy's command and communication network. The enemy later admitted that communication shortcomings during both phases of the offensive were among the causes of his failure (1) .

- City logistic plans based on assistance provided by the in-city organizations and various forms of disguise to transport arms into the city, including fake funerals to burry arms in cemeteries, and commercial transport trucks. Logistical problems were extremely hard for the enemy during the offensive because of deserted streets. The only way for the Viet Cong to get food was to steal it from the population.

- The enemy's antiaircraft methods in the city were based on his contention that only armed helicopters and skyraiders were used by government forces in raids on street blocks occupied by the VC. The documents admitted that air raids caused heavy casualties and great difficulty for the enemy. Their countermeasure consisted of using 12.7 and 12.8mm heavy machineguns with concentrated fire to prevent helicopters from flying low.

- Roadblocking methods consisted of cars parked across the street or at street ends, burning materials, cutdown trees, and debris from demolished houses,etc.

The enemy also envisaged an administrative take-over while giving specific directives to soldiers on what not to do to win the support of the city population.

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(1) We think that the enemy attacks were well coordinated across the country.

What the Communists learned from their general offensive

From their offensive against Saigon, the Viet Cong learned some experiences in city fighting which they claimed were particularly useful. Here are some of their seemingly most sound conclusions :

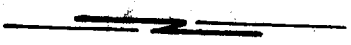
- Before the offensive, sapper and ranger units as well as city underground elements should be launched deep into the target area. The main attacking force will follow. This was the plan the enemy followed during the second offensive wave in May 1968. The Communist main force was then able to penetrate the 5th, 6th and 7th precincts because it had been preceded in the areas by the sapper, ranger and underground elements. During the first offensive wave the sapper elements were inserted with the main force and were not able to create favorable conditions for the enemy to take control of street blocks.

- In defense of their positions, the Viet Cong would leave only a small force to face our troops while their main force would split into several units which would concentrate when ordered on flank or rear attacks. The enemy called this a combination of defensive and surprise offensive tactics. The size of the surprise offensive force would be from platoon to company strength. Diversionary tactics and various disguised methods would also be used extensively, particularly in intelligence and reconnaissance operations.

- The movements of combat units into and within the city require easy-to-carry equipment and reduced numbers. Each squad would have no more than 7 men divided into 3 cells : 2 combat cells and 1 anti-tank cell. A platoon would consist of only two squads. But a company should have 5 or 6 platoons as the company is the basic combat unit in city fighting and requires combat support as well as antiaircraft and engineering supports. The troop movement within the city should be avoided. Destruction of street lamps should be carried out when necessary. Guides must be efficient and as numerous as possible.

As far as weapons are concerned, extensive use of the B.40 and B.41 should be avoided because of their limited effect.

The rockets also are too heavy, and have no serious effects when fired into upper stories of tall buildings. Weapons that should be used include the AT (anti-tank) tromblon, and the Basdor which is stronger and more efficient than the B.40 or B.41. A Basdor bullet can blast through a thin wall, destroy an armored vehicle or bring down a helicopter. In addition, the 60 mm mortar, M.79 and 12.8 anti-aircraft machinegun should also be used. Individual anti-gas masks are also necessary while urine can be used to neutralize the effects of tear gas.



CHAPTER IV

CAUSES OF VIET CONG TET DEFEAT

Causes of Viet Cong Tet defeat

The Communist Tet offensive was the result of long months of planning. In their own judgement, as maintained in a Communist document complementing what was known as their "Decision No 13", the time had come for decisive action on all three fronts - political, military and military proselyting - to achieve final victory.

The Communists chose to launch their general offensive on a day when it was less expected by the government side : the day of the Tet cease-fire, a truce which the Viet Cong themselves had proposed to expand to three days.

They had changed their strategy of encircling the cities from strong positions in the rural areas into one aimed at taking over the cities in order to liberate the countryside. In case of success of their "general offensive general uprising" plan, they would form a coalition government in Saigon and demand that the United States leave South Vietnam. In case of failure, their forces would go back to the countryside, leaving behind special guerilla and sapper elements to create a permanent state of disorder in the cities.

Tactically speaking, the Communist plan consisted of three phases :

1. Infiltration of guerilla units as well as arms and ammunition into the cities and townships for combined action with underground sapper elements in opening the offensive.

2. Regular enemy forces would subsequently enter the scene and occupy key military and administrative installations, particularly radio stations to broadcast both taped Communist statements and forced appeals to the population by local military and administrative officials.

3. Street demonstrations in support of the Viet Cong, calling for a cease fire and the formation of a coalition government.

In spite of the enemy's determination to win in launching their offensive and its being so well planned, the results

were not what they had expected. Well conceived as it was, their whole scheme collapsed in the end, showing how futile Hanoi's efforts had been in mobilizing all its resources in pursuit of an illusory victory. The Communists, however, will not give up dreaming of winning the war through military efforts beyond the capacities of a small nation and with a party dictatorship machinery that forces innocent people into a destructive, never-ending war.

Much has been written here and throughout the world, on the Communist Tet offensive of 1968 with conflicting assessments of its results. The enemy claimed it was a victory while our side described it as a major defeat. It is therefore extremely difficult for us to put forth arguments of our own in assessing the Tet Mau Than events without the risk of being labelled as not objective.

At the time of this writing, the preliminary peace talks between the United States and the Communists had already begun in Paris in an attempt to bring the war to an end. A new assessment of the causes of the Communist defeat in their 1968 general offensive, therefore, does not seem out of context :

A. - STRATEGY

In their own judgement, the Communists maintained that on the one hand the ARVN had no strength for both offensive and defensive actions and would collapse in the face of a total, surprise attack; and on the other hand, the people of South Vietnam would welcome the Viet Cong forces and would help them destroy the anti-revolutionary Saigon regime.

What actually occured was the reverse of the Communist prediction. The armed forces of the RVN did fight well and efficiently in both offensive and defensive actions to repel the Communist surprise attack. No ARVN unit surrendered to the enemy although some were under heavy Communist pressure. Only a few withdrawals from isolated posts were reported (1).

No city or provincial town was captured by the enemy, and no key military position fell into enemy hands, while even minor positions remained well defended.

Our reaction was immediate (2) and efficient although at the beginning the Americans were rather slow in joining the fight.

As far as the people were concerned, generally

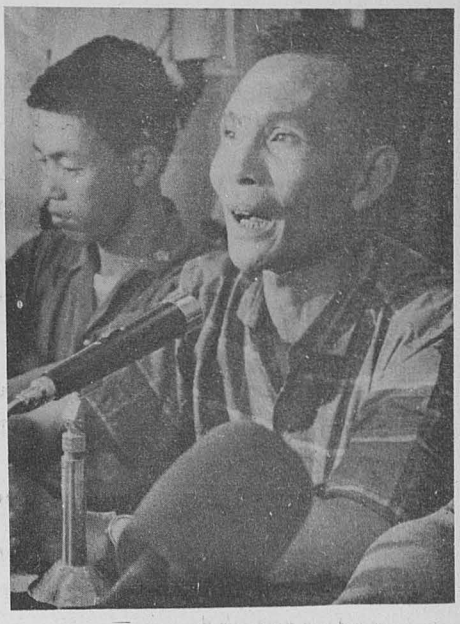
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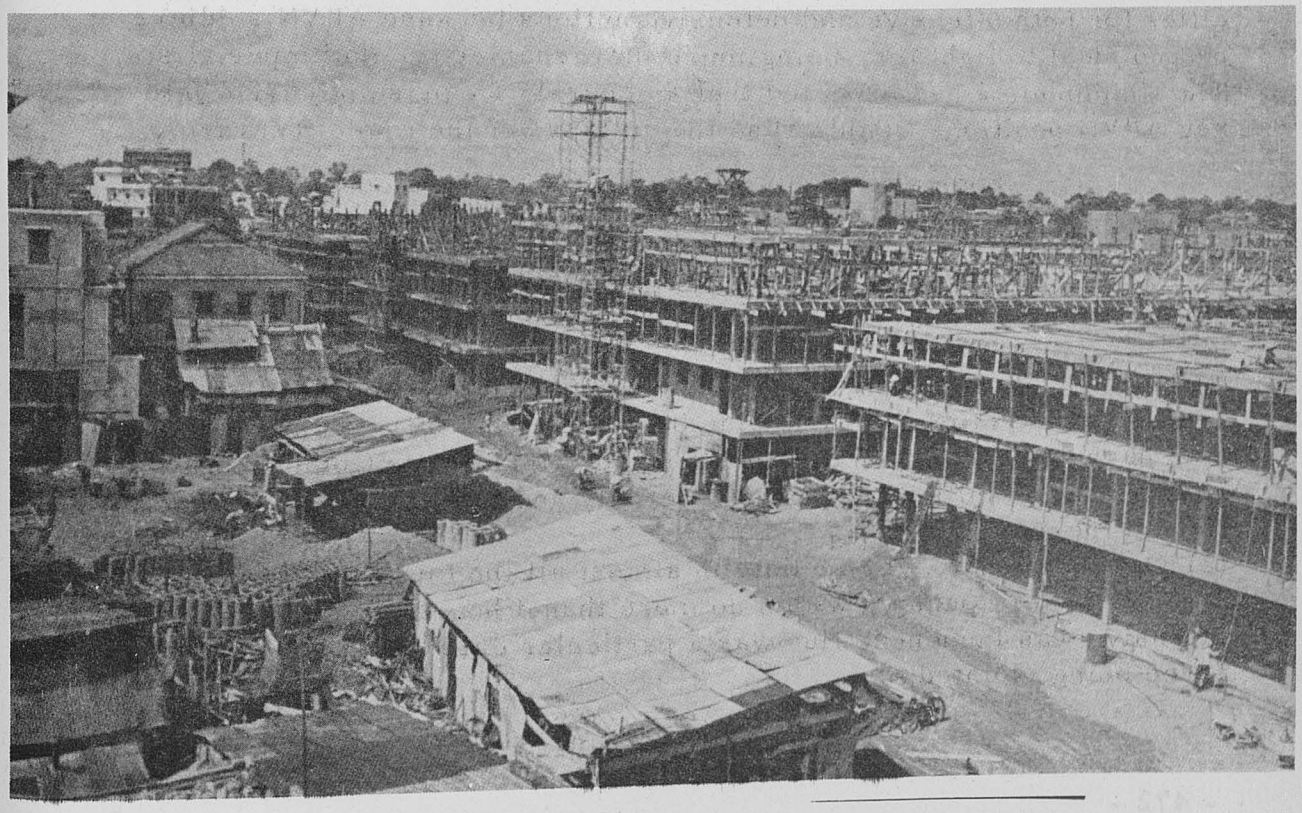
LTC Phan Viet Dung, Commander of Regiment 165/CT7 as shown meeting with the press 31 May 1968



Phan Van Xuong, Deputy Comander of the Quyet Thang Regiment.
Pictured on 17 June 1968.



LTC Tam Ha, Deputy Political Commissar of Military Region I as interviewed by the press on 16 May 1968.



Most houses destroyed in Saigon have been replaced by appartment houses. Photo above shows the Van Hanh complex building.

speaking there was no sympathy with the enemy. The general reaction of the population throughout the country was recorded as follows :

- Everybody sought to flee the battle scene although the enemy tried hard to prevent people from fleeing;

- Except Hue where a small minority supported the enemy, people in all other cities remained indifferent to the Communist call for rebellion;

- In only a few provinces, peasants were brought into town by the enemy for street demonstrations, but they were stopped and disbanded as soon as they reached the city's outskirts, and showed signs of relief upon escaping enemy hands;

- There were no popular movements. Only leaflets were distributed by some Communist political cadres operating underground.

As early as on the very first day of the general offensive, one could already see the strategic errors of the whole Communist plan. The enemy had indeed underestimated the ARVN strength A high-ranking VC cadre by the name of Nam Dong, arrested before the offensive, said the Communists believed the ARVN had no capacities for both offensive and defensive actions because ARVN soldiers had no ideal to fight for, being mere mercenaries for the imperialists. The Communists had expected that a general, surprise offensive into key ARVN positions would cause the collapse of the whole RVN army.

Such a reasoning, based on subjective considerations rather than facts, was the cause of the Communist defeat.

The RVN armed forces, indeed, have always been animated by a strong anti-Communist tradition marked by a deep

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(1) Throughout the offensive period, the VC radio broadcast false reports of defections to their side by a number of officers and enlisted men of the 2/9 Battalion and the 269th Regional Force Company. In reality, these units were fighting fiercely and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy.

(2) The reaction was immediate in almost all the cities and townships throughout the country, within no more than 3 hours after the enemy offensive was launched. Hue was a particular case with the reaction force being isolated.

hatred of the Communist regime. This tradition never faltered under any circumstances. Even in late 1964 when the ARVN was under heavy pressure by overwhelming enemy forces coming from the North, our soldiers accepted many sacrifices in resisting the enemy advance. There was not a single defection or spontaneous abandon of position by any ARVN unit.

Also in 1964 when the country was deep in a political upheaval, no foreign influence was able to alter the nationalist, anti-Communist attitude of the ARVN.

In addition to this anti-Communist tradition, other ARVN characteristics are to be mentioned as determining factors in building up the ARVN combat capacity and willingness :

- The ARVN salary scale shows no big differences between lower and higher grades, thus causing no detriment to the confidence between officers and enlisted men. Such a salary scale could be described as a social revolution which leveled injustices in the armed forces so that all soldiers can feel equal in the treatment received and thereby more enthusiastic in carrying out their duty of national salvation.

- The ARVN soldier's morale is subjected to continued boosting. He is proud of being part of the nation's defense force and regards the act of surrender as an act of betrayal to his dead comrades-in-arms. Close and sincere confidence among soldiers is another ARVN characteristics, although too much confidence often leads to loose discipline (1).

- The ARVN's moral strength was not conspicuous because of the many ills that beset the national life prior to and under the Second Republic. This caused the Viet Cong to believe at first glance that the ARVN was a weakened, ready-to-collapse force.

The same one way judgement on the part of the Viet Cong prevailed in their assessment of the civilian side of the matter. They believed that the populations in cities and townships had been "ripe" for a general uprising "to save the nation from the US imperialist aggression" .

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(1) People in nearly all cities and townships attacked by the enemy complained they had things stolen from their houses.

The Viet Cong, of course, never admitted before the people that this is an ideological war initiated by themselves with the objective of communization of South Vietnam. The people of South Vietnam are all well aware that prior to 1959 there were no more than 300 American advisors in the country, and that American troops had come here at the request of the RVN government. The people of South Vietnam also know quite well that Communist North Vietnam had the backing of other Communist countries without which its aggression against the South could not have been launched. The presence of American forces in South Vietnam, thus, is regarded by the South Vietnamese as something natural in the nation's anti-aggression process.

Although there are in free South Vietnam various political tendencies which differ from the anti-Communist stand of the majority, these tendencies do not reflect the general attitude of the population itself varies from one part of the country to another. For example, people in the northern part of the South, being poor and full of complexes, are more enthusiastic about politics than people in the southern part where easier living conditions create less interest in political problems. The country's political upheaval in 1963, thus, was marked by small struggle political movements in Hue, Danang and other cities of Central Vietnam while all cities in the western provinces remained quiet. The capital city of Saigon was also calm despite its status as the center of national politics.

A major change was brought to the social face of South Vietnam in the course of 1966 and 1967 by the arrivals of allied troops from the United States, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia, totalling 550,000 men. The presence of these troops made the country's economy prosperous but troublesome.

People in areas where allied troops (1) were stationed were provided with many kinds of jobs in such varied fields as base and airport construction, utility maintenance and repair, rest and recreation, house rent and car wash, and other services, with

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(1) Allied troops at the end of 1967 included : 497,948 Americans, 48,839 South Koreans, 6,579 Australians, 2,242 Thais, 2,021 Philippinos, 534 New Zealanders, 30 Nationalist Chinese, and 13 Spaniards. Total : 557,774 men.

monthtly incomes often higher than the salary of a government official. Manpower was much needed for the construction of houses designed for rent to Americans, and for other activities connected with the allied logistics and support operations, providing opportunities for Vietnamese laborers to earn an easy living for themselves. In the meantime those workers with a fixed salary became needy under the crushing monetary volume launched on the market leading to a devaluation of the Vietnamese piaster.

The South Vietnamese economy before the 1968 Tet offensive was one of apparent prosperity mostly to the benefit of two categories of people : firstly the business go betweens, and the laborers, either skilled or unskilled, who had been able to find jobs easily and earned much more money than they were used to, and secondly, those who faced no problems created by the increase of prices as they had reached a standard of living higher than ever before.

The economic factor is vital in the life of human beings. Prosperity causes no discontent while hunger forces people to struggle for a change. In preparing for their general offensive of 1968, the Communists did not realize that what they called the poorer class in South Vietnam had actually been enjoying prosperity and the richer class had become richer, while the petit bourgeois people, who suffered most under the economic circumstances, remained the strongest anti-Communist elements of the community. The Communist plan for a general popular uprising, thus, could not materialize.

B. - TACTICS

A Communist document dated Feb. 9, 1968 captured in Danang - a report to the Communist Command of Zone 5 - listed the enemy's shortcomings in the Tet general offensive. These were regional shortcomings but they were typical of the nationwide pattern :

- The Communists admitted that their forces inside the cities were not strong enough to help the attacking forces from outside reach their goals;

- The combat capabilities of the ARVN had been overestimated by the attacking forces. Therefore, they dared not deploy larger contingents (1).

(1) This contradicts the VC strategic view that underestimated the ARVN strength.

- The date and time of the offensive had been delayed without all units being informed, resulting in discrepancies that reduced the initial surprise factor.

- The general offensive and general uprising plan was carried out at a time when the ARVN and allied forces were in a "shaky" position (?) and not entirely depressed as they still had 1,200,000 men available (sic).

The same document presented a post-offensive VC reasoning as follows :

" The General Offensive was an operation, a continued fighting phase that will last until the final victory. How long it would last depends on our efforts and leadership ".

The operation as envisaged by the VC implied three possible developments :

1. General offensive and general uprising at the same time.

2. General offensive first, followed at a certain point by general uprising.

3. General Offensive without success in inciting the population into general uprising : in this case, the troops must withdraw and regain strength to start all over again.

The Viet Cong said the first development did not occur, the second development was obtained in Hue, and the third development was what happened in all the other cities and townships.

The Communists were defeated in both their strategic and tactical schemes, but they were clever enough to conceal their defeat under some new terminology, a field in which they had been specialized. Unsuccessful as it was in achieving what it had been intended for, the "General Offensive - General Uprising" now had its decisiveness substituted by the notion of protracted, flexible pursuit of the same goal. This was to boost the morale of Communist soldiers which had been on the verge of collapse following the bloody Tet frontal assaults. Communists leaders knew only too well that their troop units were good only for guerilla and countryside warfare, and their participation in frontal attacks against the cities would cause resentment and perplexity among the regional cadres.

They gave to the Tet general offensive a new direction to prove that the party's leadership could not have been mistaken. As a matter of fact, when the general offensive strategy was put out by the party's leadership, regional Communist cadres were much perplexed as to how to implement it to reach the huge goals set. Namely, the heart of the cities. Therefore there was much doubt about the success of the plan at its very onset.

Documents showed that the Communists had to postpone twice the launching of the offensive's first phase. The second phase was originally set for Feb. 15, 1968, but was later postponed to 17 June 1968 and then cancelled altogether, with only indiscriminate mortar and rocket shellings being launched instead. The third phase, originally planned for 22 April, was first delayed until 28 April and later until 5 May 1968.

Internal difficulties also forced the enemy to change their forces, targets and troop itineraries. For example, in the Tri-Thien-Hue area, the Group 8 force replaced the Group 9 force at the last minute. The 2nd sub-zone (North of Long An) had its targets substituted by those of the 3rd sub-zone (Binh Tan) and vice-versa, one day before the offensive. The 9th sub-zone which had originally been scheduled to attack Saigon's 9th Precinct was sent against the Highway Bridge instead.

Major shortcomings also were noted in the enemy's communication and liaison network. No sooner than the offensive was launched did the Communist command lose its contacts with the Saigon front. Units attacking Saigon also were not able to communicate with one another. Communist soldiers fled in complete disorder, and many units got lost. Two companies of the Communist 6th Battalion happened to enter the Phu Tho race track area while their target was somewhere else. The 10th Rangers lost contact with the "R" front command and the sub-zone one command. Political cadres based at Phu Tho Hoa were unable to communicate with the unit attacking the Saigon Radio Station.

Also according to enemy documents, the Communists admitted that although they were able to take control of Hue at the beginning, their offensive plan was upset due to :

- weak defense positions after occupation of the city;
- loss of direction in street fighting;
- loose combined actions, slow deployments;

- untimely use of reserve forces;
- reluctance in concentrating forces for fear of air raids.

Similar circumstances were noted at other places throughout the country :

- the enemy's main forces, with the support of sapper and underground elements, after succeeding in entering the cities, failed in all their attacks against our positions although in some cases the defenders were out numbered;
- the enemy's main forces did not have enough troops after they entered the cities for decisive, quick action against our key positions;
- the attacking forces did not have any rest and lost all their energy after night's fighting; they were able to hold for a few more days only after taking refuge in civilian houses;
- no enemy reinforcement was able to reach the city from outside;
- heavy casualties and losses of weapons were sustained by the enemy everywhere.

Heavy enemy casualties and losses were acclaimed by both local populations and friendly troops throughout the country. People realized that the Communist morale and combat technique were much lower than they used to be before 1954.

Communist soldiers, impressed by large streets and tall buildings they had never seen before, lost their confidence as soon as they heard our counter-offensive gunfire.

Other tactical mistakes on the Communist part were noted in cities such as Quang Ngai where the enemy artillery shelled the city before the infantry waves were launched, and Nhatrang where the Communists concentrated their attacks on minor positions leaving the Special Force Command free to stage a counter-offensive. A similar circumstance occured in Kontum where the enemy did not attack the 24th Special Zone Command on the first day of the offensive. In Phan Thiet, the enemy's main thrust was against a suburb post.

Generally speaking, Communist soldiers were not battle trained and lacked enthusiasm. Most of them, furthermore, were too young, with many being new recruits. They were sent into the cities, where they fought in disorder, not knowing whether they were winning or losing, or what had been captured or recaptured (as

in the case of Quang Ngai). Political cadres in seeking to foment an uprising were relying on the troops while the troops were relying on a political success.

Thus, the general offensive strategy of the enemy had been conceived beyond the tactical capabilities of the Communist units in South Vietnam who were but guerilla units unable to cope with conventional warfare facing an opponent army with strong supporting firepower.

All that the general offensive was able to achieve was a propaganda impact and confusion, death and destruction among the urban population, for which the Communists had to pay a high price in human lives and weapons.

C. - POLITICAL

The Viet Cong created a new political organization called the "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces", also called Front Number Two. Why ? According to Huynh Tuong, a Khanh Hoa provincial political commissioner who was arrested in Nhatrang during the Tet offensive, stated that even high-ranking VC cadre in the South did not understand this new move. They contended that the "National Liberation Front" had been conducting the war against the American imperialists and the Saigon regime in the name of the people of South Vietnam since the end of 1960, and there was no reason for substituting it with another front. What was harder for them to understand about the formation of the Alliance was the fact that the NLF had been expanded since late 1967 to include more elements as indicated by a change in its name (1).

The issue was quite embrassing for high-ranking Communist cadre who had to try to explain the new move. As the name "Liberation Front", had been familiar to the people and had brought some significance to the struggle in South Vietnam despite it being actually supported by the North Vietnamese Communists in a war of aggression against the South. Therefore, why change the name.

But North Vietnam had a different view point. Convinced that the 1968 general offensive would lead to a final victory

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(1) From "Liberation Front of South Vietnam" to "National Liberation Front of South Vietnam".

Hanoi leaders deemed it necessary to create a new political organization as a timely move that could attract more people from the opposition, increase the possibility of holding direct talks with the United States and gain international recognition in view of the immediate formation of a coalition government.

The new political alliance was formed to include leading elements living in the nationalist zone in order to deceive world public opinion.

After the failure of the general offensive, nobody knew which of the two Communist made fronts in South Vietnam was the main one. What appeared crystal clear to all was the NLF could no longer conceal its nature as a tool of Communist aggression. As far as the "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces" was concerned, it had turned out to be an abortive movement. The Communist general offensive, designed to present it to the world, had failed. In the eyes of the urban populations, it was no less a disguised Communist organization than the NLF.

D. - PROPAGANDA

What was played up by the Communist propaganda machinery through both Hanoi and NLF radios during the Tet general offensive ? First, the formation of the so called "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces" in the South was announced. It was the NLF who acted as spokesman for the Alliance, calling for united action to restore "independence, democracy and peace" to the South in view of later national reunification.

The Alliance's avowed aim was to topple the legal government of South Vietnam and to form a neutralist coalition government that would include nationalist elements that oppose the RVN government and the American intervention.

Although the general offensive failed the very day it was launched, the Communist radios kept claiming victories for more than a week, trying to boost the red soldiers' morale. It might be interesting to record these facts here for future generations to judge how untruthful the Communist propaganda was :

A communique issued by the Communist command in Saigon - Gia Dinh reported that offensive troops had occupied "within ten days" the ARVN General Staff headquarters, the American

Embassy, the Tan Son Nhut air base, the Go Vap rear area, and had control on most of Saigon's 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th precincts while expanding their thrust into the other precincts. The same communique said Communist troops had taken control of Bien Hoa and Binh Duong cities and the connected bases, the districts of Cu Chi, Ben Cat, Duc Hoa, Thu Duc and Tan Uyen and most of the countryside around. It said that 10,000 allied troops including 3,000 Americans had been killed, while tens of thousand others had defected, and that the whole government machinery in Saigon had collapsed. The communique also claimed that 200 planes, over 600 military vehicles including 200 armored cars had been destroyed, and people from all walks of life in the liberated cities and villages had joined popular self-defense units with "weapons captured from the enemy". It said tens of thousands of ARVN officers, soldiers, police men and officials had joined the "people's ranks"; and all conditions were favorable for a complete final victory.

Another Communist communique, issued by the central area command, had the following contents : "From 30 January to 4 April 1968, our forces smashed key military and administrative organs of the enemy in the cities of My Tho, Ben Tre, Chau Doc, Dinh Tuong, Kien Phong, Go Cong, the towns of Mo Cay, Thanh Phu, Binh Dai, Cho Lach, Cai Lay, Cai Be, Hoa Dong, Tri Ton, Tinh Bien, An Phu, Tuyen Nhon, Kien Binh, Thanh Binh, Hong Ngu. Six sub-area command headquarters, and 4 operational staff commands of the sub-area level were destroyed. 16,000 enemy soldiers including nearly 1,000 Americans were killed. Seven battalions, including one American battalion, three 41-vehicle armor units were annihilated. 14 vessels and 115 military vehicles were destroyed and 13 planes were shot down. In My Tho alone, 5,000 enemy soldiers were put out of combat, 50 posts were completely destroyed, while the Marine Battalion at Cai Lay lost 500 men within three days. In addition, 400 enemy soldiers surrendered to our side. Key highways such as Highway 4, Highway 24, the Cao Lanh - An Huu road, Highway 6 and the Ben Tre - My Tho road were under constant pressure by our troops. We destroyed the Rach Mien bridge and took over the My Thuan ferry..."

A third communique issued by the Command of the western area had the following contents (summary) :

"From 31 January to 7 April 1968, simultaneous attacks were launched against the cities and towns of Can Tho,

Soc Trang, Vinh Long, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Rach Gia. The command headquarters of the IV Corps suffered heavy losses; the command headquarters of the 14th, 16th and 32nd Regiments were destroyed. 6,200 enemy soldiers were captured. 25,000 enemy soldiers and cadres were put out of combat. Eight regular battalions were decimated as were the 43rd and 44th Ranger Battalion, the 2/31 Battalion, the Engineer Battalion at Can Tho, the 4/14 Battalion, the 1/15 Battalion, and the 3/32 Battalion. In Vinh Binh alone, 1,200 security and police agents defected and 1,000 weapons of all kinds were seized. Our forces attacked 7 airfields, inflicting crippling damages to the Lo Te, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh and Ca Mau airfields. 100 planes were shot down and hundreds of military vehicles were destroyed including 40 armored cars. Tens of vessels were captured, as were the two junk bases of Vinh Long and Tra Vinh. The enemy pressure on rural areas was lifted the whole of Soc Xoai town was liberated, and more than 200 posts were smashed".

The enemy command in charge of Thua Thien - Hue also issued a communique with the following contents :

"From 31 January to 9 February 1969, our forces liberated the Thua Thien - Hue area through 175 battles not taking into account hundreds of other battles fought by regional guerilla units. We overran 53 enemy positions, destroyed two prisons, captured more than 10,000 enemy soldiers including 1,800 Americans. The 7th Armor Regiment was annihilated as were 6 enemy battalions including 2 riot police battalions, 1 mechanized transport battalion, 1 engineer battalion, 2 infantry battalions and 17 American companies. The 1st Infantry Division was decimated, with its 1st and 3rd Regiments losing up to 3/4 of their men. The Paratroop Brigade was put out of action. The whole popular force structure including 169 regiments, 18 Revolutionary Development companies were destroyed. 118 planes of all kinds were shot down or destroyed, 250 military vehicles including 60 tanks, and 20 artillery pieces of the 175-mm, 155 mm and 105 mm types were destroyed. 10 war vessels and junks were sunk. 10 arms and ammunition depots were seized, along with 2,000 weapons of all kinds. 12 bridges were blown up. Tens of thousands of people welcomed the formation of a revolutionary government. Youths, students and school boys received arms to form combat units which were ready to fight the enemy after intensive military training. The Americans are now reinforcing the puppet regime's troops in an attempt to recapture Hue. They have suffered heavy casualties and will certainly be defeated".

All other enemy war communiques were of the same line. All claimed big victories, with particular emphasis on a final victory described as within reach to boost the red soldiers' morale.

On 14 February 1968, marking the 7th anniversary of the unification of the liberation forces in the South, Vo Nguyen Giap declared :

"Looking toward the South, our brother land, the great war front of our nation, all the cadres and soldiers of the Vietnam People's armed forces swear to uphold the heroic, unflexible, lasting and creative spirit of combat as well as the valuable experiences of the soldiers and people in the South, for a closer and more determined action in view of our final victory over the Americans".

A news bulletin issued on 13 February by the NLF news agency announced that the Command of the Liberation forces in the South had warmly praised the various units involved in the general offensive, with most of them being awarded the Liberation Military Medal.

The intensity of the enemy's victory broadcasts later died down, and Liberation Radio returned to its usual themes. The Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces was no longer heard of. People in North Vietnam and in Communist controlled areas of the South began to realize that the general offensive had failed. Critical views from the Communist camp were heard for the first time.

According to a dispatch from Hong Kong on Feb. 14, Mao Tse Tung was not pleased with the Communist general offensive in Vietnam. He viewed it as not in accordance with his own doctrine as it violated the basic rule of guerilla warfare by attacking the cities. Mao regarded the VC general offensive as a manifestation of adventurism which used to be the subject of the Red China's biggest ideological conflict before the Cultural Revolution. The conflict opposed Mao and Ly Lap Tam, a member of the Chinese Communist Party Central Executive Committee's Politburo who was in charge of the Party's propaganda. Ly, who had the backing of almost all the leaders of international Communism, maintained that attacks against cities and the establishment of city bases should be conducted at the same time as guerilla warfare in the countryside.

The defeat of the Communist general offensive was a great disappointment for the people of North Vietnam. It caused much

confusion among the Communist ranks in South Vietnam as they no longer hoped for either a military victory or an early end to the war. They lost their confidence in the Communist leadership. In the face of the American military might, they now realized that a victory would not be as easy as the Hanoi leaders had claimed. They felt they had been pushed into a bloody war where their individual and crew served infantry weapons could hardly fight the mighty air, artillery and armor fire power. They concluded that continued fighting on such a basis would certainly lead them to death.

Communist soldiers from North Vietnam had to endure more sufferings. They missed their wives and children, and were afraid they would die away from home. During their infiltration into the South, they had been deceived by their leaders whose order was to "go and take over" the South as three-fourths of the land had been occupied by "our comrades in the South". In short, the Communist general offensive brought about the collapse of the Red soldiers morale.

Many enemy soldiers killed during the offensive were very young. Most of those arrested were between 14 and 18, and had come from the North. They showed no signs of toughness upon arrest, and would readily tell questioners all they knew. They were in direct contrast to the Communist soldiers arrested before 1954 who never gave any information. Such young boys had been sent by North Vietnam into the South probably because they had no family ties and were considered more enthusiastic.

These youths, however, did not fight with much enthusiasm during the general offensive, as illustrated by the fact that no RVN key positions fell into their hands. This showed that the younger generation of North Vietnamese are less fanatic about Communism than their elders were during the resistance war against the French. Youths fighting the resistance war against the French, in addition to their desire for independence, also wanted to overthrow the feudal regime then prevailing in Vietnam. Now that the feudal regime had been abolished and replaced by a Communist regime which turned out to be no better and even worse, the new youths of North Vietnam felt they had no cause to fight for.

According to Communist returnees, the soldiers in North Vietnam were subjected to a very simple propaganda drive. Without the endless terminology of Marxism and other Communist

dogmas, the drive was centered on patriotism : fighting the American imperialists and their puppet regime.

Many North Vietnamese soldiers and people, however, did not ignore that in waging war against the South, their leaders had the assistance of Communist China and the Soviet Union and the influence of both had altered the country's independence. They also were aware that the anti-American call was designed to deceive the people and conceal the true nature of the war : an aggression against South Vietnam, an ideological war that had lost its meaning. This explained the collapse of the Communist morale during and after the general offensive. This collapse marked for the first time by mass surrenders of hundred of Communist soldiers - something that never happened during the resistance war against the French.

Following their acute setback, the enemy retaliated madly by shelling the cities indiscriminately for one month. This was a big mistake in what they claimed to be a people's war. The Communists betrayed their own rule, just because the people in the cities had failed to welcome them. Another retaliation measure was the massacre of civilians in Hue where thousands were executed or buried alive. Ordered by the Communist leadership itself, the massacre shocked public opinion both at home and abroad.

After their defeat in the cities, the enemy returned to rural areas and their usual guerilla activities. Again they claimed they had taken control of the countryside to encircle the cities. But this argument had lost its appeal to the peasants, who had suffered too much from the war and heard too many VC promises to continue to believe the Communists would win. What the Reds claimed as great victories had turned out to be nothing but sheer exploitation, heavy taxes, unpaid labor, destruction and death.

To strengthen their infrastructure in rural areas, the Communists now could rely only on their hard core cadre, reinforced by cadre coming from the North, which further unmasked what they had claimed to be a people's uprising in the South.

Another important fact that should not be overlooked was the defection of high ranking Communist cadre to the government side, something that never occurred during the resistance war against the French. Many returnees under the RVN "Chieu Hoi" program were high ranking Viet Cong cadre. They rallied to the government side for various reasons, but indicated in the final analysis

that the morale of VC troops had actually collapsed. Following are some typical examples :

- Colonel Tam Ha alias Tran Van Dac, 50, of Binh Thuan province, a high ranking officer in the command staff of the VC 9th Division, rallied the government side after the first wave of enemy attacks against Saigon. He said after the Tet offensive, he was ordered by VC General Tran Van Tra to replenish at all costs his decimated unit in view of a new offensive. He said he found such an order extremely embarrassing and disappointing and this was one of the reasons that prompted him to quit the VC ranks.

- Captain Phan Van Xuong, 44, of Gia Dinh, Deputy Commander of the Quyet Thang Regiment, said since he left South Vietnam to go North after the Geneva Agreement of 1954, he had always thought that there would be two ways for him to see his family again in the South : a complete Communist take over in the South or a defection to the RVN ranks. After years of fighting, he said, he had come to the conclusion that the Reds could never win this war as "it is an aggression war that goes against the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people". The only alternative that remained for him then was to defect. And immediately after his defection, he was able to reunite after 14 years of separation with his wife, Nguyen Thi Ba, a school teacher at Hoc Mon, and his only son, Phan Van Thach.

- Senior Captain Nguyen Cong Tan, deputy VC security chief at Binh Thuan, said a Viet Cong rule stipulated that "three returnees are worth seven Americans or RVN soldiers". This indicated that the Viet Cong tried hard to prevent their men from defecting.

- Senior Captain Nguyen Van Giau, 44, a medical doctor, chief of the VC medical service in the Saigon - Cholon - Gia Dinh special area, who was born in Khanh Hoi, Saigon and had been a Communist Party member for six years, had an active role in the Communist general offensive. He said because of his petit-bourgeois origin - his father was a member of the Democratic Party - he had always been ill treated by the Communist Party despite his 23 years in service of the Communist cause. Giau added that he quit the Communist ranks without any regret as he had always felt he would be purged by the Party in the end.

- Captain Vo Thai Thanh alias Ut, 32, of Can Tho, deputy commander and chief of staff of the Tay Do 2 Regiment, defected to the government side at Chuong Thien in July 1968. Captain

Thanh said he had intended to defect since he was sent by the Party to a Marxist Indoctrination course. Upon comparing the Marxist doctrine with the realities of life, he found out that the doctrine contains nothing but illusions that could bring no real social progress and help eradicate injustices of which he had been a victim througout his years in service of the Party and Uncle Ho. Thanh said his regiment was decimated in the grand offensive and lost all popular support upon returning to its base area. People who used to be enthusiastic now became cool and indifferent. Communist propaganda no longer attracted them as opposition to the party leadership was growing even openly.

Thanh continued : "I tried hard to explain things to the people but failed to convince any of them... because before the offensive we had told them that our victorious troops would celebrate New Year in Can Tho.

" The people wouldn't listen to us anymore. You cannot deceive them twice : Facing such an audience, we found ourselves in a very embarassing situation. Party and Front orders indeed had put us in a deadlock. And that's why I quit and joined the government " .

Similar statements were made by many other enemy soldiers who defected to our side after the general offensive. They all indicated that the bamboo curtain had shown signs of being shaken.

CONCLUSION

THE "Tet" Offensive was the largest campaign ever staged by the Viet Cong. It took them over a year to prepare it and all of their resources and resourcefulness to execute the plan of battle that they hoped would shift the military balance in their favor.

Now that the campaign has come to an end with both success and failure characterising its development. The campaign marks a definite turning point in the Vietnam crisis which emphasizes the following points :

In the first place, the "Tet" offensive brought the fighting war to a new degree of intensity in which new strategic and tactical concepts were initiated. The new Viet Cong strategy was mainly based on our subjective assessment of the enemy's capabilities and their troop deployments in-country and diplomatic moves abroad. All moves were aimed at striking a decisive blow. Tactically, the Viet Cong relied on surprise attacks - in the daytime, during a holiday period and in the course of a holiday ceasefire.

In the second place, the general offensive campaign soon became a general retreat. In bringing the war into the cities, the enemy also committed two mistakes : the deployment of an army of guerrillas in cities, and their inacurate assessment of popular support. These two mistakes resulted in the total failure of their offensive campaign.

In the third place, it somehow brought about the joint participation of US and Viet Cong delegations in the Paris conference. The opening of the Paris talks could be explained by Hanoi's weariness and Washington's desire to placate anti-war sentiments both in the US and abroad. This is definitely a turning point in the struggle which then became more political than military although the first stage of the talks brought about nothing dramatic.

On the side of the Republic of Vietnam armed forces, the "Tet" developments indicated the following shortcomings : (1) Over-confidence in one's strength, thus a prevailing mood of complacency in every walk of life. Too much self-interest which was incompatible with the conditions in a country at war. These shortcomings can be

partly traced to an attitude of over-reliance on the American allies in spite of the many calls of the nation's leaders to more austerity and dedication to national unity. The feeling of over reliance was still very much intact until the day the enemy struck.

On the part of our American allies, there also was too much optimism.

The VC, too, suffered from this optimism. As they failed to gain their objectives, they soon recognized that the main reason for their failure was that they skipped a stage of the doctrine of revolutionary warfare. This truth was apparent in many captured Communist documents. Moreover, the Viet Cong failure also resulted in incomparable losses in manpower and equipment, followed by deteriorating morale that had its best reflections in their lack of confidence in the traditional Communist strategy and the leadership of the Party.

Following step by step the long "Tet" campaign, one certainly would see more than an indication of Hanoi's war weariness. This had its best reflections in; an ever growing number of teenaged combatants sent to the frontline without adequate preparation, in the dipping morale of Viet Cong troops, who became more and more unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices, and the mounting difficulties faced by the Communist war machinery in bringing so many people and supplies to the Southern frontlines.

The enemy was faced with very much the same dilemma before and after their "Tet" offensive. Since they were unable to win the war militarily in the face of strong allied power, their expectations to achieve a military victory turned into gloom. There lies the reason why the conflict was brought to the conference table that originally saw only the participation of US and North Vietnamese delegates.

In this last phase of the conflict, the enemy again tried in vain to bring the war to the cities of South Vietnam. His failure to achieve any clearcut victories, however, once more resulted in the death of thousands of innocent civilians and the destruction of many populous areas. It also reflected the enemy's resentment at not being supported by the people since there is no other explanation for the pounding of populated areas with 122mm rockets.

In the view of quite a few Vietnamese observers, this also indicates the enemy's inability to enter serious negociations

that may result in a lasting peace. Also, the many mass meetings organized by the Viet Cong in the countryside during the "Tet" events proved that in the case of an arrangement for a peaceful conclusion of the conflict, the enemy will not hesitate to resort to terror to win the peaceful contest.

On the basis of the many acts of terror recorded during the campaign, especially in Hue, it can also be said the implacable Viet Cong will be more implacable - especially vis-a-vis those who fail to give them their support. The assassination and mass murder of so many innocent people in the former imperial capital also may indicate the Viet Cong not only want to eliminate all opposition but also all seeds of opposition.

In addition, it can also be said that to strengthen the hands of their representatives at the conference table, the Communists will make a great military effort. The prospect for the future is one of intense fighting following this "Tet" offensive.

Saigon, August 1968




DẠY CẤP - TỐC ĐỂ
GIAO DỊCH VỚI MỸ
Đọc Nhân
Đại Hiệp