

ALLOWED THE NVA TO DEVELOP A SOPHISTICATED LOGISTICAL APPARATUS TO SUPPORT THIS NEW FORCE.

DESPITE THIS STRENGTH, THE NVA WAS UNSURE OF ITS ABILITY TO COMPLETELY CONQUER THE SOUTH. COSVN'S RESOLUTION FOR THE 1975 CAMPAIGN INDICATED TOTAL VICTORY WAS NOT EXPECTED UNTIL 1976. HEAVY COMBAT IN 1975 WAS TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR VICTORY BY WEAKENING THE RVNAF. THE POSSIBILITY OF AMERICAN BOMBING INTERVENTION WAS A MAJOR FACTOR IN MODERATING NVA OBJECTIVES, AND THE ATTACK ON PHUOC LONG PROVINCE WAS GEARED TO TEST AMERICAN REACTION TO A MAJOR ENEMY OFFENSIVE. THE NVA SAW AMERICAN INACTION AS THE GREEN LIGHT FOR INITIATION OF A HEAVY OFFENSIVE. EVEN AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, THE NVA PROBABLY DID NOT EXPECT THE STUNNING SUCCESSES WHICH WERE TO FOLLOW.

THE LULL: FOLLOWING THE CAPTURE OF PHUOC LONG PROVINCE, THE NVA BEGAN FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR LARGE-SCALE ASSAULTS. ARVN BEGAN TO PREPARE CONTINGENCY PLANS, ESPECIALLY IN MR-1, WHERE THE HEAVIEST ATTACKS WERE EXPECTED. IN MR-2, ATTACKS WERE EXPECTED AROUND KONTUM AND PLEIKU. MOVEMENT OF THE 968TH DIV TO KONTUM FROM LAOS TENDED TO CONFIRM THIS. HOWEVER, THERE WERE SOME INDICATIONS THE 10TH AND 320TH DIVS HAD MOVED SOUTH, POSSIBLY TO QUANG DUC PROVINCE. DURING FEBRUARY, U.S. AND ARVN INTELLIGENCE WAS UNABLE TO RESOLVE WHERE THE ATTACK WOULD COME OR TO FIX THE LOCATION OF MAJOR ENEMY UNITS IN MR-2, BASED ON CONTRADICTIONARY REPORTING PROVIDED BY SIGINT AND HUMINT SOURCES.

THE BATTLE: COMBAT ERUPTED ON 4 MARCH ALONG MAJOR LOC'S (ROUTES 19 AND 21) TO THE HIGHLANDS IN MR-2, AND THE ROADS WERE QUICKLY INTERDICTIONED. ON 10 MARCH, BAN ME THUOT WAS ATTACKED SUDDENLY BY TWO NVA DIVISIONS, ONE OF WHICH, THE 316TH, HAD INFILTRATED UNDETECTED FROM NORTH VIETNAM. WITH MAJOR ROADS CLOSED, ARVN WAS FORCED TO PIECEMEAL COMMITMENT OF REINFORCEMENTS, RESULTING IN THE LOSS OF BAN ME THUOT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE 23D ARVN DIV.

THE FLIGHT: ON 14 MARCH, PRESIDENT THIEU ORDERED EVACUATION OF THE HIGHLANDS, RECOGNIZING THEIR INDEFENSIBILITY. A TOTAL LACK OF PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION TURNED THE WITHDRAWAL INTO A ROUT. WITHIN TWO HOURS, THE ROAD SOUTH WAS CLOGGED WITH MILITARY AND CIVILIANS IN VEHICLES AND ON FOOT. THE NVA RUSHED TROOPS TO ATTACK THE FLEEING COLUMN, WHICH MOVED SLOWLY ALONG ROUTE 7A. MILITARY UNITS WERE COMPLETELY DISORGANIZED, AND WERE INCAPABLE OF DEFENDING THE COLUMN. THE NVA PURSUED TO THE COAST, CAPTURING TENS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES AND A VAST AMOUNT OF EQUIPMENT. THE PRECIPITOUS ABANDONMENT OF THE HIGHLANDS SET A TONE OF PANIC AND DEFEATISM WHICH WAS TO SPREAD INFECTIOUSLY IN COMING DAYS. THE NVA FORCES MOVED QUICKLY TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS SITUATION. A FEW ARVN UNITS, NOTABLY THE 22D DIV IN BINH DINH AND THE 3D ABN BDE IN KHANH HOA, RESISTED THE COMMUNISTS, BUT OTHERWISE THE COMMUNIST DRIVE DOWN THE COAST MET LITTLE OPPOSITION.

IN MR-1, THE GVN DEFENSE NETWORK BROKE BEFORE IT WAS EVER REALLY SUBJECTED TO HEAVY COMBAT. COMMUNISTS ENJOYED SOME SUCCESS DURING EARLY MARCH, BUT THE HEAVIEST BLOW AGAINST MR-1 DEFENSES

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WAS THE MOVEMENT OF THE ARVN AIRBORNE DIVISION TO SAIGON ON 12 MARCH. THIS UNIT WAS WIDELY REGARDED AS ESSENTIAL FOR A STRONG DEFENSE AND ITS LOSS HAD A SEVERE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT.

CIVILIAN AND MILITARY MORALE WAS LOW AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE AIRBORNE UNIT, EVACUATION OF THE HIGHLANDS, AND A SERIES OF SHARP BUT LIMITED ENEMY ATTACKS. BUT WHILE STRONG THREATS HAD DEVELOPED IN QUANG TIN AND QUANG NGAI PROVINCES, THE FIRST AREA TO BREAK WAS QUANG TRI. ON 19 MARCH, THE PROVINCE CHIEF ORDERED ITS ABANDONMENT, ADDING TO THE FEELING OF PANIC IN THE REGION.

NEVERTHELESS, THE MR-1 COMMANDER PLANNED TO FIGHT. THESE PLANS WERE DISRUPTED BY VACILLATION OF THIEU, WHO GAVE A SERIES OF CONFLICTING ORDERS: FIRST TO ABANDON HUE IN THE FACE OF HEAVY ATTACKS, THEN TO DEFEND IT. COMMANDERS FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO REVERSE THE MOVEMENT OF THEIR UNITS SO QUICKLY. TROOPS AND EQUIPMENT WERE STRANDED ON ROADS ALREADY CLOGGED BY REFUGEES, MAKING COMMAND AND CONTROL EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. AT THE SAME TIME, THE COMMUNISTS LAUNCHED ATTACKS NEAR THE CITY. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IT WAS DIFFICULT TO AVOID PANIC. EFFORTS WERE MADE FOR ORDERLY WITHDRAWAL OF SOME UNITS, BUT WITH ONLY MARGINAL SUCCESS. BY THE TIME THE ATTEMPT WAS MADE, ROUTE 1 HAD BEEN CUT BETWEEN HUE AND DANANG AND COMMUNIST FORCES WERE ATTACKING AROUND THE CITY.

BY 24 MARCH, QUANG NGAI AND QUANG TIN WERE LOST, AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES FLED TO THE ENCLAVE AROUND DANANG. FEAR-STRIKEN RVNAF PRESENTED ONLY TOKEN RESISTANCE TO NVA FORCES. MASSIVE DESERTIONS WERE REPORTED AS GVN TROOPS FLED TO DANANG WITH THEIR FAMILIES.

WITH DANANG CLEARLY INDEFENSIBLE, AIR/SEA EVACUATION COMMENCED. THE AIR EVACUATION ENDED ON 28 MARCH, WHEN UNCONTROLLABLE MOBS OF PEOPLE CROWDED ONTO RUNWAYS, MAKING AIR OPERATIONS IMPOSSIBLE. BY 29 MARCH, DANANG WAS A SCENE OF CHAOS. WITH NO ORGANIZED DEFENSE, THE SECOND LARGEST CITY IN THE SOUTH FELL TO THE COMMUNISTS WITHOUT A STRUGGLE. NVA FORCES WALKED INTO THE CITY.

IN THE SOUTH, CONTINUING COMMUNIST PRESSURE CAUSED A SNOWBALL EFFECT, AND BY 3 APRIL THE NVA HELD ALL OF MR-2 EXCEPT NINH THUAN AND BINH THUAN PROVINCES. QUI NHON, NHA TRANG, AND DALAT HAD BEEN ABANDONED.

COMBAT WAS LIGHT FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, AS THE NVA HASTILY PREPARED FOR ATTACKS IN MR-3. THE STUNNING SUCCESSES IN MR-1 AND MR-2 WERE UNEXPECTED BY THE NVA, AND A FEW DAYS WERE NEEDED TO CONSOLIDATE GAINS AND REINFORCE. IMPROVED COMMAND AND CONTROL WHICH HAD ALLOWED THE NVA TO CAPITALIZE ON THE GVN'S WITHDRAWAL NOW AIDED IN THE SWIFT MOVEMENT OF FORCES. DIVISIONS FROM NORTH VIETNAM, MR-1, AND MR-2 MOVED SOUTH TO MR-3, WHILE DIVISIONS FROM MR-4 WERE MOVED NORTH AND EAST TO MR-3. NEWLY-CAPTURED EQUIPMENT AND ROADS AIDED THIS MOVEMENT, WHICH WAS ACCOMPANIED BY FORWARD DEPLOYMENT OF AAA COVER.

MEANWHILE, RVNAF MADE HALF-HEARTED EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE ITS DEFENSES WITHOUT MUCH EFFECT. SOME UNITS WERE FORMED FROM THE 18,000 ARVN SOLDIERS EVACUATED FROM MR'S 1 AND 2. BUT THEY PROVED

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TO BE ONLY MARGINALLY EFFECTIVE WHEN LATER COMMITTED TO COMBAT.

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TO : SAC, HONOLULU (158-1000)
FROM : SAC, WASHINGTON (158-1000)
SUBJECT: [Illegible]

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OF 13 ARVN DIVISIONS, SIX WERE RENDERED COMBAT INEFFECTIVE IN MR-1 AND MR-2. HAVING BEEN ROUTED ONCE, IT WAS UNLIKELY THEY WOULD PERFORM WELL WHEN REMNANTS WERE RECONSTITUTED.

THE FALL: MILITARY ACTIVITY IN MR-3 BEGAN IN TAY NINH PROVINCE, WHERE A MAJOR COMBINED ARMS ATTACK ELIMINATED ALL GVN PRESENCE WEST OF THE VAM CO DONG RIVER, RESULTING IN THE LOSS OF TRI TAM DISTRICT, BINH DUONG PROVINCE. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY THE LAUNCHING OF HEAVY ATTACKS IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE REGION AGAINST GVN POSITIONS ALONG ROUTES 1, 20, AND 333. IN THE PROCESS, TWO DISTRICT TOWNS, DINH QUAN IN LONG KHANH PROVINCE AND HOAI DUC IN BINH TUY PROVINCE WERE OVERRUN. HEAVY FIGHTING SUBSEQUENTLY SHIFTED TO XUAN LOC, CAPITAL OF LONG KHANH PROVINCE, WHERE ARVN FORCES WITHSTOOD REPEATED THRUSTS BY AT LEAST ELEMENTS OF FOUR NVA DIVISIONS. THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE 18TH ARVN DIV FROM XUAN LOC ON 21 APRIL SIGNALLED THE END OF ARVN RESISTANCE IN EASTERN MR-3 AND OPENED THE WAY FOR ATTACKS AGAINST SAIGON/BIEN HOA ITSELF.

- DLVR: COMCRUDESGRU ONE (25)...ACT
- DLVR: COMDESRON THREE ONE (8)...ACT
- DLVR: COMPHIBGRUEASTPAC (12)...ACT
- DLVR: FITCPAC SAN DIEGO CA (3)...ACT
- DLVR: FLTCOMBATDIRSYSTRACENPAC SAN DIEGO CA (25)...ACT
- DLVR: FLTCORGRU ONE SAN DIEGO CA (6)...ACT
- DLVR: NAVPHIBASE CORONADO SAN DIEGO CA (8)...ACT
- DLVR: NAVUSEACEN SAN DIEGO CA (2)...ACT
- DLVR: NTCC SAN DIEGO CA (1)...ACT
- DLVR: USS BAGLEY (1)...ACT
- DLVR: USS LYNDEI MCCORMICK (1)...ACT
- DLVR: USS SAMUEL GOMPERS (1)...ACT
- DLVR: NAVCOMMSTA SAN DIEGO (0)...ACT
- DLVR: NAVSTA SAN DIEGO CA (0)...ACT
- DLVR: COMNAVSURFPAC SAN DI (0)...ACT
- DLVR: COMTRAPAC SAN DIEGO (0)...ACT

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ON 21 APRIL, THIEU BOWED TO INCREASING PRESSURE AND RESIGNED. HE WAS SUCCEEDED BY VICE PRESIDENT TRAN VAN HUONG, WHO INITIALLY ASSUMED A MILITANT POLICY OF CONTINUED RESISTANCE. AFTER SEVEN DAYS IN OFFICE, HUONG TURNED OVER THE PRESIDENCY TO FORMER GENERAL DUONG VAN "BIG" MINH, WHO IMMEDIATELY BEGAN IMPLEMENTING PLANS FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS. THE COMMUNISTS, HOWEVER, ADDED A NEW PREREQUISITE FOR NEGOTIATION, DEMANDING THE ELIMINATION OF THE WAR MACHINE. IN ADDITION TO THE PREVIOUS DEMANDS FOR DEPARTURE OF ALL U.S. AGENTS AND ELIMINATION OF THE THIEU CLIQUE.

ON 26 APRIL, THE NVA LAUNCHED THE FINAL ASSAULT, WHICH THEY NAMED THE "HO CHI MINH CAMPAIGN." STRIKES WERE MADE AGAINST ARVN ELEMENTS IN THE LONG THANH-LONG BINH AREA. PHUOC LE, NEAR VUNG TAU, CAME UNDER ATTACK AT THE SAME TIME AND FELL QUICKLY, ISOLATING VUNG TAU. THE BEAR CAT ARMOR SCHOOL AND LONG THANH DISTRICT WERE ALSO OVERRUN. DIRECT ATTACKS ON LONG BINH BEGAN AND DANIC BEGAN TO BREAK DOWN THE DEFENSES AROUND BIEN HOA. ON 28 APRIL, TAN SON NHUT CAME UNDER HEAVY ROCKET AND ARTILLERY ATTACKS, FORCING ITS CLOSURE. SIMULTANEOUS GROUND ATTACKS WERE CONDUCTED AGAINST THE ARVN IN CU CHI, LAI KHE, AND VIRTUALLY ALL FRIENDLY POSITIONS AROUND SAIGON CITY. THE NVA STRATEGY APPARENTLY WAS TO DESTROY REMAINING ARVN UNITS OUTSIDE THE CITY AND AVOID A PROLONGED FIGHT IN SAIGON ITSELF. ON 29 APRIL, VUNG TAU AND BIEN HOA FELL. SAIGON WAS DEFENSELESS. MINH'S LAST-DITCH EFFORTS FOR A CEASEFIRE WITHOUT OUTRIGHT SURRENDER WERE REJECTED BY THE COMMUNISTS AND ON THE MORNING OF 30 APRIL, MINH ANNOUNCED THE SURRENDER OF THE GVN.

VOLUMES WILL BE WRITTEN ABOUT "WHY" THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE AND U.S. FAILED SINCE THE 1973 CEASEFIRE. BRIEFLY, THE DEFEAT WAS THE CULMINATION OF A LONG SERIES OF MILITARY, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOWS WHICH UNDERMINED RVNAF'S WILL AND ABILITY TO FIGHT. ALTHOUGH FAR FROM CONCLUSIVE, THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS SOME OF THE REASONS "WHY."

U.S. LOGISTICAL SUPPORT FOR THE RVNAF DECLINED, WHILE CHINA AND THE USSR INCREASED THEIR SUPPORT TO THE NVA. COMMUNIST COMMAND AND CONTROL IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY, BUT RVNAF'S COMMAND AND CONTROL BROKE DOWN AND EVENTUALLY WAS LEFT LEADERLESS.

ON THE POLITICAL SCENE, U.S. WAR WEARINESS, REFLECTED BY CONGRESSIONAL RESISTANCE TO CONTINUED GVN SUPPORT, INCREASED DRASTICALLY. IN SOUTH VIETNAM, CYNICISM ABOUT THE ABILITY AND HONESTY OF THE GOVERNMENT GREW AMONG THE POPULATION. OTHER THAN ANTI-COMMUNISM, A TOTAL LACK OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY EXISTED IN THE COUNTRY.

REDUCTION IN U.S. AID COUPLED WITH INFLATION CRIPPLED THE GVN ECONOMY AND DEMORALIZED ITS ARMED FORCES. THE COMBINATION OF THESE AND OTHER FACTORS RESULTED IN SERIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS FOR THE GVN. A SENSE OF ISOLATION, DEFEAT, AND ABANDONMENT BECAME WIDESPREAD, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE DEFEAT IN PHUOC LONG PROVINCE AND THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. LIKewise, THE ABSENCE OF MASSIVE AIR AND ARTILLERY SUPPORT, WHICH THE RVNAF HAD COME TO RELY ON AS A RESULT OF U.S. TRAINING, ADDED ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOW TO GVN'S WILL TO RESIST. THE NVA EXPLOITED THE

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OPPORTUNITY AND HAMMERED ON THE FINAL EPITAPH OF THE REPUBLIC OF
VIETNAM--"ALL FINI."

IPAC ANALYSIS: MAJ NORRIS, MAJ SULLIVAN,
CPT MATHIS, LT TEAGUE, MR MURATA

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