

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~Evacuation Arrangements at the Site

On 9 March, at Site 85, the senior CAS adviser briefed the senior Air Force representative on the fact that an attack could come at any time. The evacuation plan was reviewed at that time and it was agreed that if evacuation was ordered, the TACAN/TSQ personnel would, if possible, proceed to the Command Post area near the helicopter pad (at lower elevation and 1/4 mile from the TSQ facility) where they would be picked up by helicopters. If this movement was not possible, the technicians were to wait for the pickup at the TSQ site. It must be noted that a few feet from the entrance of the supply van (Fig. 7), there were webbed belts or slings hooked up to allow the technicians to descend to a lower ledge a short distance down from the site level. Below this ledge, there existed a sheer drop of well over 1400 feet. The CAS adviser's comment was that: ^{103/}

"The technique of personnel hanging over the cliff by straps was not discussed as a serious escape or evasion plan."

About 2000L on the evening of 9 March, Site 85 reported enemy contacts around the site. Additional sorties were requested throughout the night and a number of flights were diverted to support the defenders. However, the enemy apparently had not mounted a serious attack. To lend support for the next day, 13 missions loaded with CBU and 750-pound bombs were fraggged into the area. ^{104/}

On 10 March, friendly patrols continued to report enemy activities and the movements of villagers fleeing the general area. ^{105/} To help

30
UNCLASSIFIED~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

ILL NEVER
EVACUATE TO
THE STAYED
TOUGH TO
THE END.

SMALL
IN THE
CLIFF
WHICH
PROVIDED
PROTECTION
FROM ROCKET
FIRE.

WAS -
IT EVER INTEND-
DOO AS SUCH.

HEAVY
MACHINE
FIRE

Bill
42

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

restore guerrilla influence into certain areas west of Site 85, as well as to attempt to recapture some villages and outposts. General Vang Pao began making plans to introduce nearly two battalions of his Meos to the region west of Site 85. ^{106/} Unfortunately, these forces were to be of no help to Site 85.

Final Enemy Attack

Although weather in the Site 85 area had been generally poor in early March, good weather prevailed throughout most of 10 and 11 March. The afternoon forecast for BARREL ROLL on 10 March called for 2000 foot scattered with occasional rain showers. Attache reports at 0138L and 0247L on 11 March ^{1130 AM} termed the weather "workable" and that it "permits air defense." A survivor reported the weather on the morning of the 11th was clear. Later, on the day of the 11th, the weather deteriorated again somewhat.

Shortly after 1800L on the evening of 10 March, ^{6 PM} mortar, artillery and rocket rounds from Phou Den Din began falling on the defenders of Phou Pha Thi. ^{107/} Early in the barrage, the 105mm Howitzer position near the summit of Phou Pha Thi sustained a direct hit. The living quarters immediately next to the TACAN/TSQ facility had suffered some damage, and by 1830L the technicians had sought shelter in a bunker just north of the living quarters. ^{108/} Prior to retiring to the bunker, site personnel notified 7/13 JACC at Udorn AB, Thailand of the attack and reported they were abandoning the radio. ^{109/} Contact via portable radio was maintained with the senior CAS representative in the command

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

STILL
HUNG UP
ON FAIR
WEATHER
BOMBING

BUNKER HIT
& SURVIVAL
RADIOS DESTROYED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

bunker near the helipad. ^{110/}

At Udorn, plans were rapidly developing to divert sorties to Site 85. Flare ships had to be provided to allow visual strikes because with the TSQ personnel in their bunker, the site could not direct airstrikes. Airborne A-26s were already being diverted. Additional tanker support was required for eight flights of F-4s being sent from Ubon. ^{111/}

Dill & his crew → When the barrage ceased at 1945L, ^{7:15 PM} the technicians left the bunker and returned to operating the TSQ/TACAN equipment. Only minor shrapnel damage to the TACAN antenna was sustained and no American casualties had been suffered. ^{112/} By 1950L, many of the flights which had been in the process of being diverted were returned to their fragg missions, and until midnight, two A-26s and five F-4s hit targets in the Site 85 area. All of these were under TSQ direction. In addition, six A-1s were readied to support the site and the pilots were placed in crew rest. From 0001L ^{7 AM} to 0700L, 11 March, three A-26s and five F-4s supported Site 85; the last time on target was 0320L. ^{113/} ^{3:20 AM}

By 2020L the Ambassador at Vientiane had judged circumstances to be serious enough to authorize the site to conduct the direction of sorties via clear voice transmissions. ^{114/} However, the lull in activity at the site continued. At 2100L, heavy fighting was reported at Ban Pha Thi, a village at lower elevations on the Phou Pha Thi ridge, only 1 1/2 km south of Site 85. Allegedly, the enemy was using flashlights to facilitate his climb to the village. By 2117L, fighting was going on only 1/2-

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

hour walk from the site atop Phou Pha Thi. ^{115/}

An entry in the 7/13 AF TACC log noted that at 2105L the Ambassador in Vientiane was already considering evacuating the personnel from Site 85 at first light. However, this decision was not made at that time. At 2150L the Deputy Commander, 7/13 AF contacted the Attache's Office in Vientiane concerning the possible evacuation of the site. It was indicated that evacuation should only be effected as a last resort if the situation became untenable; furthermore, the situation should be followed on an hour to hour basis. These views were to be expressed to the Ambassador. Any decision to evacuate was to be relayed to the Deputy Commander at once. ^{116/}

At 2121L, intermittent mortaring and shelling of positions around Site 85 was begun again. ^{117/} but the TSQ facility continued to operate and direct missions. Shortly after this resumption of shelling, the Ambassador decided to conduct a partial evacuation of American personnel. ^{118/} Nine personnel were to be evacuated at 0815L on the 11th.

5 AM
The situation remained static at the site until about 0300L. On the lower slopes of the ridge, sporadic but violent firefights broke out; however, the enemy had not succeeded in overrunning any of the major outposts. As a matter of fact, the senior CAS representative later ^{119/} commented:

"Commo was maintained from the CP with all the defending outposts at Site 85 throughout the attack on Site 85 during the period 10 to 11

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

March ... (the) ... defenders gave a good account of themselves and they held fast under heavy incoming fire."

SLIZ & CO

At the TSQ/TACAN location, it has already been related that, with the lull in the barrage after 1945L, the technicians had left the bunker and returned to operating the facilities. While one crew operated the TSQ facility, some of the other men tried to get some sleep. Apparently, since the living quarters had been damaged, and sometime later the technicians' bunker was also hit, some of the American personnel took sleeping bags and descended the slings to seek rest and shelter among the rocks down the steep slope only a few feet from one of the entrances to the ISO/Supply/Communications structure. 120/

3 AM

Shortly after 0300L, on 11 March, either automatic weapons fire, shelling, or both once more caused the crew to abandon the facility in haste. At this point all radio contact with the TSQ location and personnel was severed, even that via portable radio with the command bunker near the helipad. 121/

WHO SAYS SO!!

As the technicians came running out of the operations structure, they were met with a hail of small arms automatic weapons fire from close range. These men scrambled for safety down the slings which were only a few feet away. But apparently three Americans were killed at once--among them the TSQ senior officer and commander. 122/ Bill

210000Z
WAS WITH SLIZ
+ COMMS NOT GOT
BACK TO THE
TO CUT THE
WIRES
HE WAS
HE WAS
DESIGNED
220000

The crucial fact concerning the equipment at the site was that it was not destroyed. The detonation devices had not been triggered and the TSQ personnel never again entered the command building. In

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

an interview with survivors, some questions concerning the detonation devices were raised when it was revealed that explosives for demolition of the site had earlier been thrown over the side of the cliff to prevent them from being hit by incoming shells. However, the charges which were to destroy the classified equipment were pre-mounted and could not have been easily or swiftly removed. Extra charges were available to destroy other equipment and facilities at the site, and apparently it had been these extra charges which were thrown away. 123/

Evidently a small force of approximately twenty enemy troops (most likely North Vietnamese as judged by the unfamiliar language) had somehow infiltrated to the summit. No mine detonations, shouts, or other warnings preceded the volley which hit the Americans exiting the operations structure. It has been only guessed that either the enemy infiltrated the more gradual but still treacherous northeastern side of Phou Pha Thi or that this small force scaled the almost sheer northwestern face. None of the outposts was aware of this enemy force atop the summit. 124/

Seemingly familiar with the layout of the site, the camouflaged fatigue-clad invaders methodically threw grenades into most of the buildings, but it was not clear if the TSQ facility was also blown up. 125/

At about 0315L, the senior CAS representative in the command bunker near the helipad observed the TACAN beacon "go up in smoke", but it was thought at the time that a mortar round had done the damage. Meanwhile the helipad area was under particularly heavy shelling and small

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

NOT
EXPLOSIVE
BUT
THERMITE
WITH # WOOD
BE ACTIVATED
BY CUTTING
A BRANCH
WIRE

TRU 2

TRUE
↑

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

126/
arms fire.

Subsequently, enemy troops at the site discovered the escape slings leading down the slope and directed automatic weapons fire in that direction. Some of the Americans down the slope returned the fire and it was estimated that five or six of the enemy were killed. After pulling back from the American line of fire from below, the attackers responded by lobbing some fifteen to twenty grenades onto the slope and then intermittently spraying the area with automatic weapons' fire. It was deduced that most of the American casualties were suffered at this time. 127/

In Vientiane, meanwhile, the situation was being closely monitored. Plans for the partial evacuation had been finalized at 0015L for implementation at 0815L the next morning. Incoming reports indicated that air support was sufficient, weather was good, and the situation remained static. 128/ Although unaware of the fate of the TSQ facility, American officials at Vientiane were to become cognizant later that increased enemy fire was being directed at the site. Hence, at 0515L on 11 March, the Ambassador decided to evacuate all Americans from Site 85 at 0715L. 129/

An attache report summed up the situation at Site 85 as it was known in Vientiane at 0540L: 130/

"As of 10/2240Z: Heavy mortar and small arms fire on top of Phou Pha Thi (Site 85). Embassy ordered evacuation of all repeat all U.S. personnel."

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

"CAS estimates their outer positions will hold but place untenable as operating radar site.

"TACAN unit reported burning and damage to other TSQ equipment. Steps being taken to destroy all remaining equipment prior to evacuation."

Shortly before 0700L, incoming fire ceased; at 0620L smoke had been observed rising from the TACAN site. (Fig. 9.) About 0700L, the helicopters were standing by, ready to come in, but were drawing enemy fire from the top of the summit. The senior CAS advisor with ten Meo guerrillas proceeded to the TSQ/TACAN site to ascertain the status there and determine from where the fire directed at the helicopters originated. ^{7 AM} ^{131/} ONLY 2 ME0 MADE IT TO THE RADAR. THE OTHER 8 QUIT + WENT BACK.

Upon arrival at the TACAN location, the CAS representative found the living quarters locked and the TACAN severely damaged. The senior CAS representative then called out to any Americans who might have been hiding nearby, but he received no response. Coming around the west side of the complex, shots were exchanged with one enemy soldier dressed in "typical North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao uniform." After circling further south and west, two more of the enemy were encountered, one manning a machine gun behind sandbags. Fire was exchanged and one of the enemy was hit, but the friendly force beat a hasty retreat down the hill toward the command bunker. En route, the CAS representative was wounded slightly in the leg. ^{132/} HIS GUN JAMMED.

Back at the bunker, the CAS representative estimated that either the TSQ-81 was in enemy hands or they were conducting a raid, hence

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

BUT HE
MADE 100 AT
TO MASTER HI
FORCES AND 60
BACK UP
ALTHOUGH THE
WAS
20 ST

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

friendly heavy weapons fire was directed at the TSQ site and some hits were scored. A-1Es in the area apparently noted that the defenders were firing at the site and also delivered their ordnance on the TSQ location. The CAS representative was of the opinion that the TSQ gear was demolished. However, this was incorrect. Unfortunately, as one survivor reported later, the A-1E attack forced one enemy soldier to scurry for safety down the slope and en route, he engaged in a firefight with another American survivor, killing him. ^{133/}

THIS IS NEWS TO ME. I WAS NEVER GIVEN ACCESS TO THE DEBRIEFINGS. THE

The helicopters were then able to come in and perform the rescue attempts. Of the 19 Americans at the site, only five technicians and two CAS people were extracted. One of the CAS people was wounded; five of the six technicians were wounded, one of them being hit while in the helicopter--this man died en route to Site 36 and Udorn AB, Thailand. ^{134/} The remaining eleven Americans were presumed dead.

Return flights by helicopters were able to recover a few American and Laotian bodies, plus some wounded defenders from the summit, but they continued to draw occasional fire. ^{135/}

Apparently the defenders around the site still held the trail systems to the summit as late as 0730L. ^{136/} Soon thereafter, the guerrilla defenders melted away to regroup at other locations for air-lift to safer areas. It was not expected that the enemy offensive would halt with the fall of Site 85. ^{137/} In fact, Site 111 fell on

12 March; to the east, enemy pressure mounted at Site 184; Site 239 and Site 107 were abandoned due to enemy activity; on 13 March Site 204

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

I HAVE NEVER SEEN OR HEARD ANY OF THE INFO

THEY NEVER MADE AN ATTEMPT TO GET TO THE SUMMIT AS ANYONE WAS ALIVE THROUGH A DRAINAGE DITCH

EMBASSY HELD THEM VERY CLOSE

WHO?

was subjected to heavy but sporadic enemy fire. ^{138/} By 12 March, 129 of 203 defenders of Site 85 had definitely been evacuated.

As early as 0940L on 11 March the Deputy Commander 7/13AF at Udorn AB, Thailand had begun coordination to utilize some of the available helicopters to airlift a force of approximately 200 Laotian military personnel to Site 85 in order to recapture the site, but this design was delayed indefinitely so that a maximum effort could be exerted to try to recover the remaining U.S. personnel and friendly forces. ^{139/}

A TYPICAL LAOTIAN REACTION. THEY WERE ALWAYS

Denouement

"GETTING READY" & THE AMBASSADOR RAN OUT OF NERVE.

After the evacuation of Americans and friendly forces was completed on the morning of 11 March, only three tasks remained to be performed:

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS THIS WAS DONE BY AERIAL PHOTOS OF WHAT LOOKED LIKE BODIES ON THE GROUND. EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE BEEN TOLD THE AMBASSADOR & THE CIA WANTED THE CIA WANTED TO CLOSE THIS FILED

Missing Americans had to be accounted for, either by recovering them as they still evaded capture or by recovering their bodies and establishing their death.

Site 85 had to be destroyed so that the equipment would not fall into enemy hands for subsequent analysis. In addition, any politically embarrassing evidence had to be eliminated.

The Prime Minister of Laos, Souvanna Phouma, had to be informed of the situation to permit him to prepare a position against potential communist charges of American involvement at Site 85. ^{140/} THEY WANTED TO RAISE A STINK THEY HAD CAPTIVES!!

As more details of casualties were obtained from survivors and a

concentrated search and rescue effort was conducted at the site.

American losses became somewhat clearer. Of the nineteen Americans

at the site, sixteen had been site technicians, two were CAS

MUCH HIGHLY CLASSIFIED STATE OF THE ART CRYPTO GEAR & CODES.

HALONEY!!
WHY?
WHEN?
IF THEY CONDUCTED AN EFFORT AT 16 2
THE SITE WHY DID THEY BRICK ANY MORE BUT?

AS COMMANDER WAS NOT GIVEN THE OPTION. SINCE WE WERE CIVILIANS THE AMBASSADOR WOULD HAVE HAD FINAL AUTHORITY

UNCLASSIFIED
~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

representatives, and there had been one Attache Office FAC. The CAS representatives and the FAC were rescued. The senior CAS representative had been slightly wounded. Of the sixteen American technicians, five were extracted (one died en route), eight were known to be dead, and three others were unaccounted for, but presumed dead. There was

WHO SAYS??

IF SO
THEIR BODIES
ARE STILL
INTACT!!

the possibility that the bodies of the missing three men might have fallen from the ledge where the Americans hid. Off the ledge, there was a sheer drop of almost 2,000 feet.

141/

Presuming those who were not evacuated on the morning of 11 March were dead, a fairly concentrated air effort was launched on that same day to destroy the technical and personal equipment left behind on Site 85.

142/

The major phase of this activity ended on 15 March but further examination revealed one strike each at Site 85 on 19, 22, and 28 March. The 22 March strike included a Bull-Pup missile.

143/

YES BUT DID IT HIT THE RADAR??

could bodies
even be
found
after

On the morning of 13 March, the American Ambassador met with Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma of Laos. The Ambassador related that the facilities at Site 85 had not been destroyed prior to evacuation, but that USAF napalm strikes were being delivered against the site. He also told of the American losses and that some of the bodies had not been found. The Ambassador reported Phouma's reaction:

all
bodies
↑??

YES

144/

LAOS WAS
GONE ANYWAY!!
HIS GOVERNMENT
WOULDN'T FIGHT

"Souvanna winced at these two items of information and said they increased the risks that enemy could be able, if he chose, to make some pretty damaging disclosures."

SO
WHAT

A POLITICAL NIGHTMARE - THEREFORE THE EXTENSIVE
RESCUE EFFORT NEVER CAME OFF.

40

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

AT THIS POINT AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN SHOULD HAVE BEEN FIRED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

Both the Ambassador and the Prime Minister noted that no mention of incriminating evidence had yet been made by either the Laotian Communist or North Vietnamese Radios. They agreed that the best thing to do was to "sit tight" and see what evidence the enemy had accumulated and what he planned to do with it. The Ambassador's report of the meeting concluded with the following comment: ^{145/}

"Souvanna obviously does...not wish to make decision on posture he will take towards potential Communist exploitation of this incident until he knows how damaging their evidence is. He urged me to destroy as much evidence as we can rapidly. Since his position is understandable, I did not repeat not try to press him one way or another on contingency statements."

Epilogue

It is difficult to firmly establish the enemy intentions without access to enemy documents and plans. Of course these were not available for this study. However, after analyzing the data which were available, a number of observations are offered. ^{146/}

Apparently Site 85 was not the single target of enemy aims in the dry season offensive which began in November 1967. Indeed, Site 85 appeared to have been only one of the friendly strong points which the enemy seemed determined to reduce in this area.

It is generally assumed that the enemy mounted his activities against Site 85 in order to destroy the Top Secret TSQ facilities at Phou Pha Thi. However, no documentary evidence of this fact has been

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

found in the research for this study, although the existence of such a specific objective can be neither confirmed nor denied. Certainly the enemy was aware of this guerrilla base near his vital supply routes; he also knew that there was a TACAN at Site 85. These two factors, alone, would have provided sufficient incentive.

Guerrilla forces do not normally stand and fight it out; generally this is not their function, unless they are called upon to defend a very vital interest. Realizing this, the enemy first attempted to eliminate friendly forces at this site with as small a commitment on his part as possible.

However, to supplement a small commitment, the enemy used a full barrage of propaganda. CAS reports for the entire period contained numerous references to Communist-held meetings and soldiers' statements which indicated enemy determination to capture Site 85. He used this tactic to enlist the active and passive support of the local populace; he may, also, have counted on these statements reaching the guerrilla defenders, thereby, undermining their will to resist and making them think it was senseless to stand and fight.

The first two attempts to take Phou Pha Thi, the small force advance which stalled at Phou Den Din in mid-December and the AN-2 Colt attack, were certainly not large commitments. After these failures, the enemy was forced to concentrate more troops and develop elaborate plans and support for them.

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

HE WERE
GOING TO
ENEMY

THE XAVAR
WAS DIRECTING
MOST OF THE
EFFORT TO
THE NORTH
& THE NVA
KNEW IT.

THE USAF
FIGHTER PILOT
ELIQUER WILL
A NOX OWN
WP TO THIS
BUT ITS TRUE

AND THEY DIDN'T
THIS TIME ALL OUT
THO! OUT BUT 10

THAY
RAW

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

Although airpower was to be a major factor in the defense of Site 85, it could not be applied without limitations and restrictions. Defense of Site 85 was not the sole task of limited air resources in the Southeast Asian conflict. For example, during this same period, the 1968 Tet Offensive was underway in South Vietnam, the Marine outpost, Khe Sanh, was under siege, and there existed an unprecedented flow of enemy logistic traffic which had to be interdicted.

In addition, airpower could not be applied without major restrictions. ⁸⁴ As early as 8 December 1967, the U.S. Ambassador to Vientiane had withdrawn blanket approval for Commando Club strikes in BARREL ROLL, and instead, approved them on an individual basis. By 8 February 1968, only nine targets around Site 85 and outside the 12 km circle had been approved for Commando Club operations. With Commando Club strikes outside the 12 km circle limited to only approved targets, visual means had to be utilized if newly discovered targets, not on the authorized list, were also to be attacked. Visual strikes were limited by bad weather, which was particularly poor in early March. Hence, the defense of the site hinged considerably on the capability to visually acquire targets to be struck.

THE CAUSE
OF IT ALL

THE WHOLE
REASON WE
PUT THE
RAWR
THINGS

Within the 12 km circle, similar restrictions applied. It was not until 21 February that authorization was extended to the Local Area Defense Commander (LADC) to task the TSQ facility to conduct strikes against any target within the 12 km circle.

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

The application of airpower around Site 85 was intended to be responsive. Therefore, if the demand lessened or if targets could not be definitely fixed, the air effort proportionally contracted, for, there were other requirements elsewhere which had to be met. This was demonstrated by the lull in early February.

Airpower was the vital ingredient in halting what most probably was an enemy plan to take Site 85 in late February. But at that stage of events, as the accurate unofficial estimate of 25 February pointed out, even with successful ground harassment and continued airstrikes, the security of the site was doubtful after 10 March, because the attackers appeared willing to mount the necessary effort and accept the accompanying losses.

*A COMPLETE
FIASCO
AT
VIENTIANE*

On the night of 10-11 March, the Attache Office in Vientiane reported at 0138L on the situation at Site 85 and stated that "sufficient resources" were available. At 0247L, the terms used were "sufficient air support". Unknown to anyone not at the TSQ location, the facilities were lost to the enemy no more than one hour later.

Site 85 had provided direction to about 1/4 of the USAF missions over North Vietnam and BARREL ROLL from November 1967 to 11 March 1968. No other facility existed to provide a similar coverage over these areas. While this loss was a serious blow to the USAF air effort, it was not

crippling. *THAT'S BECAUSE JOHNSON STOPPED THE BOMBING - HAD HE NOT, WE WOULD HAVE PUT IN ANOTHER SITE*

The possibility that evacuation might have to be carried out was *IN FACT WE HAD ONE ALL PICKED OUT.*

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

fully realized. Plans to accomplish the evacuation existed. However, a set of circumstances developed which negated their timely execution. Had personnel at either Vientiane or the command post at Site 85 been aware of the situation at the TSQ/TACAN location atop Phou Pha Thi, steps might have been taken to eliminate the infiltrators, safely evacuate the technicians, and destroy the classified facilities. But the loss of intersite communications between the personnel at the facility and the command post prevented this action. Subsequent decisions were based on incomplete and erroneous information. THE FRIENDLIES

SHOULD HAVE DEPLOYED AROUND THE RADAR.
One question, basic to the relation of events in the fall of Site 85, has not been fully answered by available documentation and information: how did a twenty man team, armed with automatic weapons reach the top of Phou Pha Thi unnoticed? AND WHY COULDN'T 200 MEN ENGAGE THEM ONCE THEY WERE DISCOVERED.

Messages already quoted in this study described the defensive arrangements at the site. The northwestern side of the mountain was a sheer cliff of nearly 2,000 feet. Other approaches were heavily mined. In addition, by early January there were "200 troops in immediate vicinity of site; and additional 800 troops in the lower portions of the mountain."

It has been surmised that the enemy infiltrators scaled the 2,000 foot cliff. This theory might appear to account for the lack of any kind of warning before the enemy force hit the American technicians and captured the summit. However, this does not explain how twenty heavily armed soldiers climbed a 2,000 foot cliff at night, unnoticed by 200

IS ALONG
THEY WERE
ALL
200
AT THE
SOUTH
DISEMBARK

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

defenders. Nor does it relate why these twenty infiltrators were not eliminated by the defenders atop Phou Pha Thi. Apparently the friendly troops at lower elevations held fast against the enemy attacks.

On 14 March 1968, the Commander, 7AF, sent a message to the American Ambassador in Vientiane: ^{147/}

"I am concerned about the need for a postmortem analysis on the loss of Site 85. In terms of assessing whether future sites should be established believe it important to determine how a relatively small force was able to take such an allegedly well defended installation. No indications have been received here as to what efforts if any were made by local defense forces on site to defend installation, especially in view of clear indications of impending attack. Your views on how future sites might be defended in view of experience with Site 85 would be appreciated."

AND MATERIALS
THE DEFENSE
FORCES WERE THE
RESPONSIBILITY OF THE
CIA WHO FAILED

THE STATION CHIEF (THEODORE SHACKLEY) WENT
ON TO HIGH POSITION IN THE CIA

The Ambassador replied on 16 March. He concurred that a postmortem on the loss of Site 85 was in order, and suggested that procedures for such an analysis be jointly developed by 7AF and Embassy representatives. Regarding the size of the enemy forces, the Ambassador explained: ^{148/}

"Believe you should understand, however, that enemy force was not... 'relatively small.' Our intelligence indicates their numbers between five and seven battalions, with artillery and rocket support, considerably outnumbering local defense forces, which never numbered more than 1,000 men in 12 kilometer defensive perimeter which drawn around Site 85."

IF THIS
HAPPENED I WAS
NEVER INVITED TO
THE MEETINGS

It was also emphasized by the Ambassador that his office had "made clear from the beginning" that the site could not be defended

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

against a determined and superior enemy force. He also stated that the Embassy had given regular and accurate estimates of the site's progressive deterioration, and as early as 26 February, had advised that the site would probably not be held beyond 10 March. "Therefore, its fall should have come as no surprise to anyone," he said. The Ambassador made the following additional observations:

149/

"The manner in which enemy accomplished its fall is, however, instructive, and should, I think be carefully studied with view to future operations. Artillery fire, at relatively long range, was surprisingly accurate. According fragmentary reports of survivors, direct hits were scored, very early in the barrage, upon personnel quarters, operations structure, and bunkers. It seems possible that installations were rendered effectively inoperable even before destruction order was given. There may be some lessons in this which should be studied with respect to length of time technical personnel should be required stay at their posts after installation falls within artillery range. In hindsight, it seems to me we should have pulled all technicians out morning March 10 even if this means losing the last several hours of the installation's capabilities."

???

"What concerns me most is not the defensive action, but the disruption of preplanned evacuation procedure. It is still not clear why technical personnel went over cliff to a narrow ledge rather than down trail to chopper pad. CAS and local personnel subsequently went up same trail to installation searching for technicians, so we know trail was traversable, even if under artillery fire. It is also not clear to me how small Vietnamese suicide squad got to installation site, although it seems they must have scaled the cliff which all of us considered impassable."

FALCON

Within a few weeks of the fall of Site 85, the President ordered the cessation of bombing over the northern two-thirds of North Vietnam. As of the publication of this study, bombing in this area has not been

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

WHY THE FAILURE OF THE DEFENSES TO FIGHT LAD AND THAI MERCENARIES? MAKE SURE WE GO OUT

NEVER PUT INTO WRITING! A LAME EXCUSE BY US.

I BELIEVE THEY WERE ALLOWED TO PASS BY THE SAM SITE POST. THOSE WERE THE ONLY MISSILES WHEN BOMBING STOPPED

BECAUSE THEY WERE MODERN WEAPONS. THEY COULD RETURN TO THE CAMP CONTINUOUSLY WITHOUT BEING TOLD TO GET OUT. THEY WOULD HAVE BURIED IT DOWN WITH THEM. LEFT ASAP

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

resumed. No replacement facility for the TSQ-81 has been built. During a farewell visit with the American Ambassador in Vientiane on 2 July, the 7AF Commander discussed with him the requirement for additional navigational aids in North Laos and agreed to reexamine requirements. ^{150/}
The Ambassador reported on this discussion:

"We both feel that, in current circumstances, there is no justifiable requirement for MSQ installation in Laos. Therefore, our site selection in country or in neighboring Thailand ought, for the time being, concern itself with TACAN sites. In this connection General Mamyer agreed to review prospects for TACAN at Site 36 and one on prominent hill in Thailand. I agreed reexamine MSQ problem again in event bombing operations resume north of 20th parallel."

ONE WAS
INSTALLED IN
UNDER SHORTLY
THREATENED FOR
USE IN STRIKES
IN LAOS.

UNCLASSIFIED

~~TOP SECRET NOFORN~~

UNCLASSIFIED
UNCLASSIFIED

TS - 77p Secret
S - Secret
C - Confidential

FOOTNOTES

1. (TS) Laos Situation Briefing, CAS to CINCPACAF, Sep 67.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. (TS) Interview with Maj Arlie R. Conner, Commando Club Project Officer, DOSO, 7/13AF, Udorn AB, Thailand, 25 Mar 68. (Hereafter cited: interview with Conner, 25 Mar 68.)
5. (S) Oprep-4 extracts, 1 Nov 67 - 10 Mar 68, Hq 7/13AF, Udorn AB, Thailand, and Hq 7AF, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN. (Hereafter cited: Oprep-4 extracts.); (TS) discussions with Capt Thomas E. Penick, DOCAW, 7AF, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. (TS) Interview with Conner, 25 Mar 68.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. (TS) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, Subj: Site 85, 8 Dec 67.
14. (S) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, to Hq 7AF, Subj: Site 85, 23 Dec 67.
15. (TS) Hq 7AF Opord 439-68, Supplement II to Annex B, Appendix III, effective 27 Dec 67.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. (S) North Laos briefing, CAS to CINCPACAF, Dec 67.
19. Ibid.
20. (C) CAS Report, Field Office, Vientiane, (FOV) 12520, 27 Nov 67.

d. NT
know

UNCLASSIFIED
UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

21. Ibid.
22. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12780, 24 Dec 67.
23. Ibid.
24. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12705, 18 Dec 67.
25. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12842, 31 Dec 67.
26. (SNF) Report, AFSSO, 7/13AF to AFSSO, PACAF, Subj: Interrogation of Monks, 3 Nov 67.
27. (S) Msg, CSAF to USDAO, Vientiane, Laos, 7 Dec 67.
28. (S) Msg, DIA to JANAF, Vientiane, Laos, 27 Dec 67.
29. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to CINCPAC, 3 Jan 68.
30. Ibid.
31. (C) CAS Report, FOV 12923, 8 Jan 68.
32. Ibid.
33. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13021, 15 Jan 68.
34. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12971, Subj: Aircraft Involved in the Attack on Phou Pha Thi, 13 Jan 68. Doc. 1.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.; (S/NF) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 12 Jan 68.
37. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 12986, Subj: Conditions at Phou Pha Thi after Air Attack, 15 Jan 68. Doc. 2.
38. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV 12964, Subj: Enemy Air Attack on Site 85, 12 Jan 68. Doc. 3.
39. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, Subj: Air Attack on Site 85, 13 Jan 68. Doc. 4.
40. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13057, 20 Jan 68.
41. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13098, 25 Jan 68.
42. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13068, 22 Jan 68.

UNCLASSIFIED

43. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13100, Subj: Security Appraisal of Site 85, late Jan 68. Doc. 5.
44. (SNF) Report, Subj: AA Installations at Site 85, DI, 7/13AF, Udorn AB, Thailand to AFSSO, 13 AF, Clark AB, Philippines, 17 Jan 68.
45. (SNF) Msg, Dep Comdr 7/13AF to Hq 7AF, Subj: AAA Defenses TACAN Channel 97, 1 Feb 68. Doc. 6.
46. (SNF) Report, AA Installations at Site 85, DI, 7/13AF to AFSSO, Hq 13AF, 17 Jan 68.
47. (S) Msg, JUSMAGT to Dep Comdr 7/13AF, 26 Jan 68.
48. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13100, late Jan 68; and (S/LIMDIS) Memo on Changes at Site 85, 4802 JLD to DI, 7/13AF, 1 Feb 68.
49. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. (TS/NF) Rpt, DO, 7/13AF to Dep Comdr, 7/13AF and DO, 7AF, 25 Jan 68.
53. Ibid.
54. (S) Msg, 7AF to 7/13AF, DOSO, 5 Feb 68.
55. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
56. Ibid.
57. (SNF) Msg, 7AF to AIRA, Vientiane, Laos, 7 Feb 68.
58. (S) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, 8 Feb 68. Doc. 7.
59. Ibid.
60. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13141, 30 Jan 68.
61. Ibid.
62. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13153, 31 Jan 68.
63. (S) 1330Z 30 Jan 68 entry, 7/13AF TACC Log. (Hereafter cited: Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log.)
64. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13153, 31 Jan 68.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

- 65. Ibid.
- 66. (C) CAS FOV Reports, 31 Jan 68-16 Feb 68.
- 67. Ibid.
- 68. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13220, 6 Feb 68.
- 69. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13249, 9 Feb 68.
- 70. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13347, 19 Feb 68.
- 71. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13288, 13 Feb 68.
- 72. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
- 73. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13347, 19 Feb 68.
- 74. (C) CAS FOV Report, 23 Feb 68, no FOV number.
- 75. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68, Doc. 8;
(C) CAS Reports FOV 13415, 24 Feb 68 and FOV 13375, 20 Feb 68, Doc. 9.
- 76. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68.
- 77. (CNF) CAS Report, FOV unknown, 23 Feb 68; and CAS Report, FOV 13468, 28 Feb 68. Doc. 10.
- 78. Ibid.
- 79. (TSNF) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, 17 Feb 68.
- 80. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68.
- 81. (TS) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, 21 Feb 68.
- 82. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
- 83. (S) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, 23 Feb 68. Doc. 11.
- 84. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
- 85. (SNF) CAS Report, FOV 13429, 25 Feb 68.
- 86. Ibid.
- 87. (S) Msg, American Ambassador, Vientiane, Laos to CSAF, 26 Feb 68.
- 88. (S) Memo on Emergency Evacuation Plan for Site 85, CAS to DO, 7/13AF 24 Feb 68.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

89. Ibid.
90. (TSNF) Memo on Helicopter RON at Site 98, Dep Comdr 7/13AF to American Ambassador, Vientiane, Laos, 2 Mar 68.
91. (TSNF) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to 7/13AF, 4 Mar 68.
92. (S) Memo on Emergency Evacuation Plan for Site 85, CAS to DO, 7/13AF, 24 Feb 68.
93. (S) Movements plotted from data and locations contained in CAS FOV Reports.
94. (TS) Msg, 7AF to USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos, 2 Mar 68.
95. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
96. (TS/LIMDIS) Msg, 7AF, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN to CINCPACAF, DOCO, 051215Z Mar 68.
97. (S) Msg, CINCPACAF to 7/13AF, 5 Mar 68.
98. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
99. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13613, 10 Mar 68.
100. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
101. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13596, 9 Mar 68.
102. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13599, 9 Mar 68.
103. (SNF) Undated debriefing of unnamed senior CAS representative at Site 85. (Hereafter cited: Debriefing Report.) Doc. 12.
104. (S) Entries in 7/13AF TACC Log, 9 Mar 68.
105. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13612, 10 Mar 68.
106. (C) Memo; Subj: Projected Meo Moves, CAS to 7/13AF, 10 Mar 68.
107. (S) Interview with two wounded survivors of Site 85, 11 Mar 68 at Udorn AB, Thailand. (Hereafter cited: Interview with Survivors.)
108. (SNF) Msg, AFSSO, Udorn AB, Thailand to AFSSO, 7AF, 11 Mar 68. Doc. 13.
109. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.

*probably
Stan Slig
+
Woody*

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

- ✓110. (SNF) Debriefing Report. Doc. 12.
- 111. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.
- ✓112. (S) Interview with survivors.
- 113. (S) Oprep-4 extracts; (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.
- 114. (S) Msg, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10 Mar 68.
- 115. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13619, 10 Mar 68.
- 116. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 10 Mar 68.
- 117. (SNF) Msg, AFSSO, Udorn AB, Thailand to AFSSO, 7AF, 11 Mar 68.
- 118. (S) Msg, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10 Mar 68.
- ✓119. (SNF) Debriefing Report. Doc. 12.
- ✓120. (S) Interview with survivors.
- ✓121. Ibid.
- ✓122. Ibid.
- ✓123. Ibid.
- ✓124. Ibid.
- ✓125. Ibid.
- ✓126. (SNF) Debriefing Report. Doc. 12.
- ✓127. (S) Interview with survivors.
- 128. (S) Msgs, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10-11 Mar 68.
- ✓129. (SNF) Debriefing Report.
- 130. (S) Msg, JANAF, Vientiane, Laos to JCS, 10 Mar 68.
- ✓131. (SNF) Debriefing Report.
- ✓132. Ibid.
- ✓133. Ibid.
- 134. (S) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to DIA, 11 Mar 68. Doc. 14.

UNCLASSIFIED

- 135. (S) Msg, 432TRW, DOCP, Udorn Ab, Thailand to AIG 913, 11 Mar 68.
- 136. (S) CAS Report, FOV 1362Q, 11 Mar 68. Doc. 15.
- 137. (S) CAS Report, FOV 13640, 12 Mar 68; (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 12 Mar 68. Doc. 16.
- 138. (C) CAS Report, FOV 13680, 14 Mar 68.
- 139. (S) Entry in 7/13AF TACC Log, 11 Mar 68.
- 140. (TS) Msg, USAIRA, Vientiane, Laos to 7AF, 12 Mar 68, Doc. 17.
- 141. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 12 Mar 68.
- 142. Ibid.
- 143. (S) Oprep-4 extracts.
- 144. (TS) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Secretary of State, 13 Mar 68. Doc. 18.
- 145. Ibid.
- 146. (S) Discussions with Brig Gen G. J. Keegan, Jr., DCS/Intelligence, Hq 7AF, 10 Jun 68.
- 147. (S) Msg, 7AF to American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos, 14 Mar 68.
- 148. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Hq 7AF, Vientiane 5181, personal for Gen Momyer fm Amb. Sullivan, 16 Mar 68.
- 149. Ibid.
- 150. (S) Msg, American Embassy, Vientiane, Laos to Sec State, Vientiane 7592, 3 Jul 68.