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THE ATTACKS

The Tet holiday period from 27 January to 3 February 1968, the traditional Vietnamese celebration of the lunar new year, set the stage for one of the largest offensive operations undertaken by North Vietnamese (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) forces during the Vietnam War. In violation of its own announced seven-day truce, the enemy launched attacks against virtually every major city and town as well as many allied installations in South Vietnam. As of 11 February 1968, Headquarters, USMACV reported that 34 provincial towns, 64 district towns, and all of the autonomous cities had sustained ground assaults and/or attacks by fire. Two prime enemy targets, heretofore relatively untouched by the war, were Saigon, the capital and largest city in South Vietnam, and the city of Hue, the former imperial capital located in Thua Thien Province.

The first phase of the offensive, on the night of 29-30 January, consisted of attacks against Kontum, Pleiku, Da Nang, and four other cities in I and II Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ's). The main thrust was set in motion on the following night as attacking forces struck civilian and military targets -- including Bien Hoa, Long Binh, and Saigon -- in each of the four CTZ's. Hue was attacked during the night of 31 January. By the beginning of February, the back of the Communist offensive had been broken. Fierce fighting continued in Hue, and allied clearing operations were still being conducted against resistant enemy elements in Saigon, Ban Me Thuot, and other cities. Although the resumption of hostilities remained a constant threat,

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enemy-initiated activity from 1 February to 17 February was generally light and sporadic. On the night of 17-18 February, however, hostilities flared up momentarily as 21 cities, towns, and allied installations sustained attacks by fire. Ground attacks were also reported in IV CTZ and on the periphery of Saigon. On 24 February, heavy allied pressure forced the enemy to withdraw from its positions within the Citadel and abandon Hue, bringing to a close the 1968 Tet offensive.

THE ATTACK PATTERN IN II CTZ*

On the night of 29-30 January, the enemy opened its all-out offensive in South Vietnam with almost simultaneous attacks against seven cities in I and II CTZ's. In II CTZ, fighting erupted in five separate provinces. The following cities, all province capitals, were major targets: Pleiku City, Kontum City, Ban Me Thuot, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang.

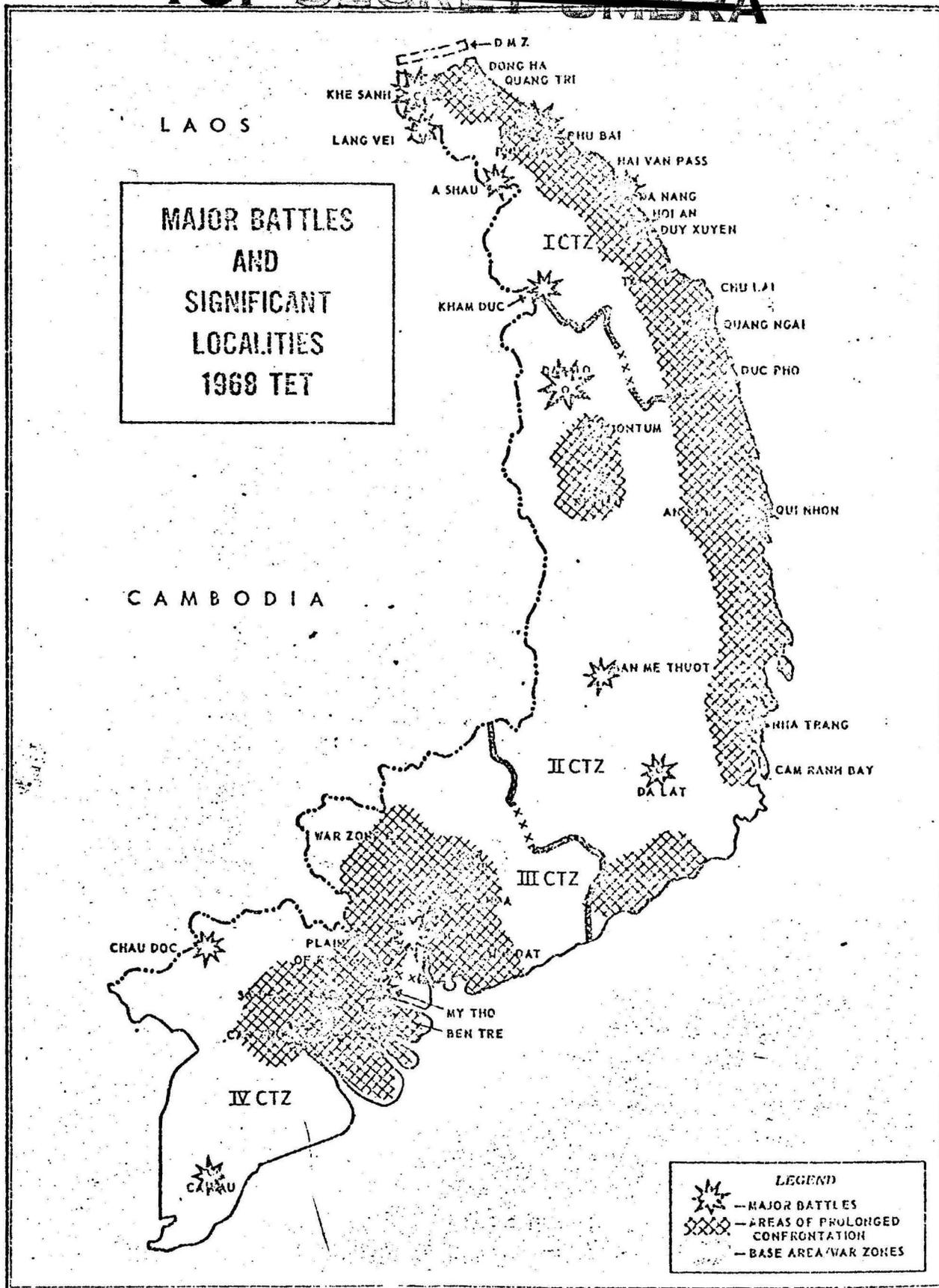
In Pleiku Province, the attacking force which struck Pleiku City consisted of the VC 407th and 408th Sapper Battalions and the VC H-15 Local Force (LF) Battalion. A battalion of the NVA 95B Regiment, a major subordinate of the B3 Front, also took part in the battle of Pleiku City. By the end of the day, the attacking force had pulled out of the province capital under allied pressure. Enemy losses in this aborted attempt to capture a major city were 164 killed.

In the western highlands province of Kontum, situated north of

* See map, Major Battles and Significant Localities 1968 Tet, P. 3.

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Pleiku Province, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attempted to seize Kontum City. Elements of the NVA 24th Regiment, a subordinate of the NVA 1st Division which was also part of the B3 Front, and the VC 304th LF Battalion were committed to the attack. Fighting continued for four days before the enemy was driven out of the city by allied reaction forces on 3 February. The attacking force again failed to achieve its objective while sustaining heavy casualties. Enemy losses in the battle were approximately 625 killed.

In Darlac Province, located south of Pleiku Province, Ban Me Thuot was the major target for enemy offensive action during the first night of the Tet offensive. The NVA 33d Regiment and the VC E-301st LF Battalion were the major enemy units involved in the battle. Fighting in Ban Me Thuot continued for four days with the attacking force completely destroying the province headquarters and badly damaging most of the city. On 3 February, allied units forced the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attackers to withdraw from the city. As in Pleiku and Kontum Provinces, the enemy's attempt to take over a province capital was thwarted. Enemy casualties were more than 230 killed.

In the coastal provinces of Binh Dinh and Khanh Hoa, unsuccessful attempts were made to seize Qui Nhon and Nha Trang. Unidentified Viet Cong LF units conducted the attack against Qui Nhon. The 7th Battalion, NVA 18B Regiment was considered to be the major enemy unit involved in the assault on Nha Trang. Enemy casualties in this battle totalled more than 200 killed.

During the next few days, other attacks were initiated against

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cities, towns, and allied installations throughout II CTZ.

In Pleiku Province, Communist troops launched ground attacks against two district capitals, Le Thanh and Le Trung, while enemy artillery elements shelled Pleiku Airfield and other allied positions. Collateral intelligence showed that elements of the NVA 95B Regiment and the VC 200th Artillery Battalion took part in these actions. Indications of impending hostilities in the Duc Co area were reflected in SIGINT intelligence. The repositioning of enemy units near Duc Co suggested that the enemy was making preparations for probable attacks, but no major assault on the city was undertaken during Tet.

In Kontum Province, Tan Canh sustained an attack by fire on 30 January, and the resultant fires destroyed nearly two-thirds of the city. On 1 February, the 2nd Battalion, NVA 174th Regiment mounted an assault on Dak To. The city had already been the site of a bloody battle between allied and enemy forces in October 1967. Prior to 1 February, airborne radio direction finding (ARDF) had followed the movement of the NVA 32nd, 66th, and 174th Regiments from the Cambodian - Kontum Province border area to attack positions west of Dak To. However, the NVA 32nd and 66th Regiments were not engaged during the battle of Dak To. In other areas of the province, the NVA 40th Artillery Regiment, a subordinate of the B3 Front, shelled several allied positions.

In Darlac Province, enemy attacks were initiated against three district capitals -- Buon Ho, Lac Thien, and Thuan Hieu. According to collateral intelligence, the VC H-5, 86th, and 88th LF Battalions as well as the VC 381st and 481st Sapper Battalions were involved.

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In Ninh Thuan, Tuyen Duc, and Binh Thuan Provinces, the Viet Cong executed attacks against the three province capitals -- Phan Rang, Da Lat, and Phan Thiet, respectively. The major battle was in Da Lat where elements of the VC 145th and 186th Main Force (MF) Battalions persisted for three weeks before withdrawing from the town.

In Binh Dinh Province, the five district headquarters along the coast were struck. In Phu Yen Province, the province capital, Tuy Hoa, and one district capital were attacked by the VC 30th MF Battalion, the VC 85th Battalion, and at least one battalion of the NVA 95th Regiment on 30 January. One day later, the 5th Battalion, NVA 95th Regiment made an unsuccessful attempt to take over Tuy Hoa Airfield, resulting in over 200 North Vietnamese casualties.

In the coastal province of Khanh Hoa, the assault on Nha Trang, the province capital, was followed by attacks on two district capitals, Ninh Hoa and Cam Lam. Elements of the NVA 18B Regiment took part in the attack against Ninh Hoa. Collateral intelligence showed that the T88th Sapper Company and the NVA 95th Artillery Battalion took part in the attack against Cam Lam.

THE ATTACK PATTERN IN I CTZ

As in II CTZ, fighting erupted in I CTZ on the night of 29-30 January, one day earlier than the main enemy thrust. Two important cities in Quang Nam Province were the primary targets. One was Da Nang, South Vietnam's second largest city and site of the Headquarters, III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF). The other was Hoi An, the province

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capital. Da Nang sustained an attack by fire from the NVA 368B Artillery Regiment, a major subordinate of Headquarters Group 44. The artillery regiment continued to shell the city from 30 January to 3 February. According to collateral intelligence, Hoi An was assaulted by elements of the NVA 3rd Regiment, a subordinate of the NVA 2nd Division, and an unidentified local force battalion.

Enemy-initiated activity in I CTZ increased in subsequent days. In Quang Nam Province, the enemy followed up the attacks against Da Nang and Hoi An with assaults on allied installations and urban centers in the four coastal districts. In Quang Tin Province, the only major target was Tam Ky, the province capital. The attack was carried out by North Vietnamese soldiers identified as part of the NVA 21st Regiment, another major subordinate of the NVA 2nd Division. According to collateral intelligence, the Quang Tin Provincial Force -- consisting of the VC 70th, 72nd, and 74th LF Battalions -- was also involved. The attacking force was stopped by allied units and suffered about 280 casualties. In Quang Ngai Province, an attack against the province capital, Quang Ngai City, was conducted by the Viet Cong on 31 January. Non-SIGINT intelligence showed that the 401st Sapper Regiment and the VC 328th Regiment were committed. Allied defenders were able to stop the enemy drive and inflict extremely heavy casualties on the attackers. Viet Cong personnel losses totalled approximately 800 killed.

In Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue (MR TTH), fierce fighting erupted in several areas, including the city of Hue. In Quang Tri Province, elements of the NVA 812th and 5th Regiments combined to attack Quang

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Tri City, South Vietnam's northernmost province capital, on 31 January. The attacking force failed to capture its objective and suffered very high personnel losses. Approximately 868 North Vietnamese soldiers were killed during the battle. In addition to the province capital, three district towns were struck in early February. On 1 February, elements of the 7th Battalion, NVA 29th Regiment attacked Hai Lang. The following day, the North Vietnamese assaulted Cam Lo and lost over 100 killed. On 5 February, the North Vietnamese attacked Trieu Phong but were repulsed by allied defenders.

In Thua Thien Province, enemy activity increased sharply on 31 January. A ground attack against Phuoc Loc District Headquarters was conducted by elements of the VC 804th Battalion, NVA 4th Regiment. At Phu Bai, the 8th Radio Research Field Station — USASA's largest intercept site in Southeast Asia — sustained an attack by fire which damaged the operations building and antennae and completely destroyed the Bachelor Officers' Quarters. Eight miles north of Phu Bai, the city of Hue — one of the main targets of the enemy offensive — was attacked by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces. NVA units identified in the attack were the 4th, 6th, and 29th Regiments. The Hue Sapper Battalion was the major VC unit involved.

The assault on Hue was one of the most successful military operations undertaken by the enemy during the 1968 Tet offensive. Communist troops seized and held large sections of the ancient imperial city for nearly a month and executed more than 3000 residents — including ARVN soldiers, government workers, teachers, leading citizens, and foreigners.

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Elements of the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) conducted counter-operations to relieve the pressure on Hue. However, resistant elements continued to operate within the city, and SIGINT intelligence revealed the enemy's intent to maintain its positions in the royal citadel. Radio direction finding (RDF) on 17 February fixed an element of the tactical headquarters, MR TTH inside the citadel. An intercepted message on 17 February indicated that the commander of the attacking force in Hue had been killed and that his replacement wanted to withdraw. One possible explanation for the movement of the command/control element into the citadel was to insure that the attacking force did not withdraw from the city. On 18 February, intercepted messages disclosed that elements of the NVA 812th Regiment, which was operating in the Quang Tri City area, were planning to move south towards Hue either to attack or to reinforce communist troops entrenched in the citadel.*

Finally, on 24 February, the attacking force abandoned its positions within the citadel and withdrew from Hue under heavy allied pressure. Fighting between allied and NVA/VC forces in Hue from 31 January to 24 February represented the single largest battle of the Tet offensive. According to Don Oberdorfer in Tet!, "the 25-day struggle for Hue was the longest and bloodiest ground action of the Tet offensive...."***

* CIA, CIA Operations Center [] 19 February 1968 (TST) (NR).

** Tet!, Don Oberdorfer, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1971.

The intensity of the battle was reflected in the high number of casualties and the damage to the city. As of 7 February, allied casualties included 211 killed and 962 wounded. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong lost more than 2000 killed. Civilian casualties were even greater. As noted before, more than 3000 residents of the city were killed by the attacking force. Destruction of the city which served as a battleground for more than three weeks was estimated at approximately 80%.

THE ATTACK PATTERN IN III CTZ

The Tet offensive was launched in III CTZ during the early morning hours of 31 January. The initial assaults on civilian and military targets were conducted primarily by Viet Cong troops from independent main force and local force units. Most of the major North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units located in III CTZ were not involved.

SIGINT and non-SIGINT intelligence showed that three enemy tactical divisions were in the Corps area at the outbreak of Tet hostilities. The NVA 7th Division, which was operating mainly in Tay Ninh Province, consisted of the NVA 101st, 141st, and 165th Regiments. Also operating in Tay Ninh Province was the VC 9th Division which included the VC 271st, 272nd, and 273rd Regiments. The third major unit, the VC 5th Division, was conducting operations primarily in Phuoc Long and Bien Hoa Provinces. Its major subordinate elements were the VC 274th, VC 275th, and the NVA 88th Regiments. Only two of these regiments in the

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VC 274th and 275th Regiments which were committed to ground assaults on Bien Hoa Air Base and II Field Force Vietnam (FFV) Headquarters in Long Binh — were engaged on 31 January.

In the Capital Special Zone, enemy forces conducted simultaneous attacks against Saigon, Cholon, and nearby Tan Son Nhut Air Base. None of the attacks were successful.

In the Saigon area, the enemy attack was actually a series of individual assaults on the American Embassy, the presidential palace, the Joint General Staff Compound, and other key targets. The attacking force was supported by Viet Cong who had infiltrated the city in large numbers prior to the day of the attack and who had been armed from caches of weapons and ammunition stockpiled in the city. One of the units engaged in Saigon fighting was identified as the C10 Sapper Battalion. All of the initial assaults were repulsed, and the attacking force suffered heavy casualties. Scattered pockets of resistance remained within the city, and terrorist activities and small skirmishes continued for several days. However, no new major assaults were initiated. On 5 February, ARVN forces began a successful sweep operation to clear out resistant enemy elements while elements of the U.S. 9th and 25th Infantry Divisions surrounded the city to block off escape routes and prevent reinforcements from entering the capital. Although Viet Cong troops persisted in the Phu Tho Racetrack area as late as 21 February, most of the enemy force had abandoned the city.

The VC 2nd and 6th LF Battalions carried out a ground assault on the city of Cholon but were repulsed by allied and South Vietnamese

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defenders.

Tan Son Nhut Air Base, located about five kilometers northwest of Saigon, received both ground assaults and attacks by fire on 31 January. The attacking force consisted of more than 1000 Viet Cong from the VC 267th and 269th Battalions and the D-16 Local Force Battalion. The main breakthrough came at a rear gate where about 100 Viet Cong penetrated the perimeter defense, dispersed into two and three man teams, and harassed allied troops with small arms and automatic weapons fire from positions along the runway and flight line. Base reaction forces and helicopter gunships combined with elements of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions to launch counterattacks to repulse the enemy drive and retain firm control of the air base.

The other prime target of the enemy offensive in III CTZ was the Bien Hoa - Long Binh complex. Concurrent with assaults in the Capital Special Zone, the enemy attacked Bien Hoa Air Base and II FFV Headquarters at Long Binh Post, situated north of Bien Hoa City. The attacking force which struck Bien Hoa Air Base included two main force units, the VC 274th and 275th Regiments. Although an estimated three companies penetrated the air base, the attack was repulsed by U.S. forces. The Viet Cong lost 57 killed and 23 captured. U.S. casualties totalled 5 killed and 30 wounded. The VC 275th Regiment was also involved in the assault on II FFV Headquarters.

Fighting broke out in other areas of III CTZ on 31 January. Small scale assaults were mounted against province capitals, district towns, and allied installations in Tay Ninh, Binh Long, Phuoc Long, Long An,

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Hau Ngai, Binh Duong, Gai Dinh, and Bien Hoa Provinces. Most of the attacks were executed by local force units of battalion size or smaller.

Enemy-initiated activity continued in III CTZ on 1 and 2 February. In Phuoc Tuy Province, the Viet Cong attacked Ba Ria, the province capital, during the night of 31 January - 1 February. The VC 445th LF Battalion was the major enemy unit that took part in the battle. Allied losses included 21 killed and 100 wounded. The Viet Cong suffered 260 casualties. On the night of 1-2 February, two VC battalions struck Xuan Loc, the capital of Long Khanh Province. The Viet Cong lost 66 killed in this action.

During the early morning hours of 1 February, elements of the VC 273rd Regiment attacked Phu Cuong in Binh Duong Province and overran the ARVN Engineer School on the northern edge of the province capital. By mid-afternoon, however, the attacking force had abandoned the city. Fighting was also reported on 1 February between the VC 272nd and 273rd Regiments and the U.S. 28th Regiment near Phu Cuong. Over 300 Viet Cong soldiers were killed in the battle. On the night of 2 February, fighting resumed in and around the city of Phu Cuong. A company of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division in defensive positions five kilometers northeast of the province capital came under attack from a battalion of the VC 273rd Regiment. According to information obtained from POW's, the battalion sustained 50% casualties.

In other areas of Binh Duong Province, North Vietnamese forces engaged the 1st Battalion, ARVN 8th Regiment on 2 February. On the night of 2-3 February, U.S. base camps at Dau Tieng, Lai Khe, and Cu Chi

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sustained enemy rocket and mortar fire, but no significant ground assaults were initiated against these positions.

THE ATTACK PATTERN IN IV CTZ

The Tet offensive in IV CTZ was launched during the night of 30-31 January with coordinated attacks in all but three provinces. As in the other Corps areas, the main targets were province capitals and district towns. The attacks were executed wholly by the Viet Cong as there were no North Vietnamese units operating in IV CTZ. USMACV estimated that 15 of 21 maneuver battalions available in IV CTZ were involved.* The Viet Cong failed to seize and hold any of the cities and towns which they attacked and suffered more than 1500 killed between the night of 30-31 January and 3 February.

In Dinh Tuong Province, a major battle was fought in the provincial capital of My Tho. The attack was conducted by elements of the VC 261st and 263rd MF Battalions and the VC 514th LF Battalion. Destruction in the embattled city was vast as the attacking force destroyed approximately 5000 homes. Civilian casualties included 64 killed and more than 600 wounded. More than 400 of the Viet Cong attackers were killed during the battle.

Two district towns in Dinh Tuong Province were also struck by the Viet Cong during Tet. Collateral intelligence indicated that elements

* SSO MACV, J-2 MACV WIEU Nr 05-68, 030409Z, 3 February 1968 (SECRET SAVIN).

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of the DT 1 MF Regiment and the VC 207th MF Battalion were committed to the ground assaults on Cai Be and Cai Lay.

In the bordering province of Kien Hoa, another major battle was fought at Ben Tre between South Vietnamese forces and elements of the VC 518th LF Battalion. More than 150 ARVN soldiers were killed in the battle, and approximately 150 civilian casualties were reported. Enemy losses were not known. In addition to Ben Tre, Mo Cay and Binh Dai were also attacked by the Viet Cong. The attacking force which struck these two district towns also included elements of the VC 518th LF Battalion.

In the three provinces of Go Cong, Vinh Binh, and Vinh Long, the province capitals — Go Cong City, Tra Binh, and Vinh Long City, respectively — were the prime targets for enemy offensive actions. Go Cong City sustained an attack by elements of the VC 514th and the 361st LF Battalions. Tra Binh was struck by elements of the VC 501st LF Battalion. Elements of the VC 857th Local Force and the 306th Main Force Battalions combined to attack Vinh Long City. In Vinh Binh and Vinh Long Provinces, attacks against district towns were conducted by company-size and battalion-size Viet Cong units.

In Chuong Thien Province, local force units mounted an assault on Vi Thanh, the province capital. In Ba Xuyen Province, elements of the VC D7164 LF Battalion conducted an attack against Soc Trang while local force units struck My Xuyen and Thanh Tri. In Bac Lieu Province, an attack against the city of Vinh Loi was carried out by five company-size local force units. In Phong Min Province, Can Tho sustained both

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a ground assault and an attack by fire. The VC 303rd MF Battalion was considered to be the major enemy unit involved in the effort to capture the province capital. Concurrent with the assault on Can Tho, the VC 309th MF Battalion combined with local force units to attack three district towns in the province.

In Kien Giang Province, the provincial capital of Rach Gia and two district towns — Ha Tien and Kien An — were attacked by elements of the VC U Minh 10 LF Battalion. In Chau Doc Province, Chau Doc City, the province capital, was struck by elements of the VC 512th LF Battalion. However, the attacking force fled with the first contact with the city's defending forces. Elsewhere in Chau Doc Province, attacks against two cities, An Phu and Tri Ton, were conducted by elements of the VC 510th and 511th LF Battalions.

In Kien Phong Province, ground assaults on the provincial capital of Cao Lanh and Hong Ngu District town were initiated by enemy elements identified as part of the VC 502nd LF Battalion. In An Xuyen Province, South Vietnam's southernmost province, the provincial capital of Quan Long was assaulted by elements of the VC U Minh 11 LF Battalion while the VC 306th LF Battalion struck Cai Moc. In Kien Tuong Province, elements of the VC 267th MF Battalion attempted to seize the province capital, Moc Hao. In Sa Dec Province, company-size forces mounted assaults on Sa Dec City, the province capital, and two district towns.

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RESULTS OF THE 1968 TET OFFENSIVE

The massive Communist offensive in South Vietnam during the Tet holidays began on the night of 29-30 January with seven attacks in I and II CTZ's, gained momentum during the following night, and ended with the abandonment of Hue on 24 February after a long and bloody struggle. As far as the realization of the enemy's military aims, the offensive did not serve its purpose. One of the primary objectives was a decisive tactical victory over U.S. and South Vietnamese military forces. To achieve this end, the enemy made an all-out effort and committed a large part of its combat forces to the Tet attacks. However, despite the intensity and coordination of the nationwide offensive, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces were able to turn back the wave of enemy attacks against urban areas and military installations and inflict extremely heavy casualties on the attacking forces. Thus, instead of attaining the tactical victory which they hoped would foreshorten the war and pave the way for a Communist take over in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong suffered a major military defeat.

After the first wave of attacks, there followed a lull in enemy-initiated activity during the first two weeks in February. Fighting continued in Saigon, Hue, Ban Me Thuot, and other urban areas as U.S.-ARVN forces conducted sweep operations to clear out resistant enemy elements. Light ground contacts and attacks by fire were initiated throughout South Vietnam almost daily. A second wave of major attacks was expected by allied commanders during February, but no significant

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ground attacks occurred. On the night of 17-18 February, there was a brief resumption of hostilities as 21 military and civilian targets, including the major complexes at Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa, were struck by enemy rocket and mortar fire. Concurrent with the attacks by fire, enemy forces launched ground attacks against urban areas in IV CTZ, and fighting also erupted on the outskirts of Saigon. All of the ground attacks were repulsed, and damage from the attacks by fire was light. Finally, on 24 February, Communist troops in Hue abandoned well-entrenched positions within the citadel and pulled out of the city under heavy allied pressure.

One indication of the enemy's all-out tactical effort was the extent of the involvement of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces in the series of attacks. Based on Order of Battle (OB) strength figures, USMACV estimated that about 45,000 enemy troops took part in the offensive as of 5 February. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong used less than half of their main force units but well over half of their local force units in the offensive. The following table shows the number of enemy troops from either main force or local force units involved in attacks in each Corps area:

MAJOR MANEUVER UNIT STRENGTHS

	Identified in combat		Not identified in combat	
	Main force	Local force	Main force	Local force
I Corps	9,800	3,730	10,940	1,050
II Corps				
Highlands	6,000	2,070	10,030	520

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E.O. 13526 3.5 (c)

Coast	4,230	1,300	4,980	300
Saigon	5,070	1,275	---	---
III Corps	3,650	800	7,420	2,225
IV Corps	3,400	4,250	2,020	1,800
Totals	32,150	13,425	35,390	5,895

Totals do not include Communist elements in the DMZ area.

The enemy suffered extremely heavy casualties since 29 January when the offensive opened, but most of the personnel losses were sustained by Viet Cong units. In I CTZ, the enemy lost more than 4,500 killed in action. In II CTZ, enemy losses totalled 2,484 killed. Estimates of casualties in III CTZ were placed at over 4,100 killed. In IV CTZ, the Viet Cong lost approximately 1,500 killed, the highest losses ever recorded in IV CTZ for a four-day period. Thus, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong sustained approximately 12,600 casualties in the first wave of Tet attacks or lost roughly one-third of its attacking forces.*

Despite the extensive personnel losses, the enemy retained the capability to renew the offensive with a second wave of attacks against urban centers and military installations. The death toll was placed at slightly more than 12,600 killed; however, most of these casualties were sustained by Viet Cong units committed to battle. Although some of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main force units were involved in the initial Tet attacks, the majority were not engaged. The presence

* (SSO MACV, J-2 MACV WIEU Nr 05-18, 030409Z) 3 January 1968 (~~SECRET DAWN~~).

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of these forces near key military targets suggested that assaults on allied installations were imminent. As noted before, however, no significant ground attacks materialized.

Although the Communists made an all-out effort, as indicated by the unprecedented nature and scope of the attacks and the extent of commitment of enemy forces, none of its objectives were captured. The attacking forces failed to seize and hold even one of the South Vietnamese cities or towns that were designated as targets. The enemy did succeed in occupying portions of main populated areas. The most noteworthy success was in the city of Hue where the enemy was able to hold out for twenty-five days. However, the attacking forces were unable to retain control in any of the populated areas where footholds had been gained. By failing to capture the major cities and towns, the Communists were also denied the political victory they sought. The capture of cities and towns was designed to be the first step towards organizing a coalition government that would ultimately join with Hanoi.

The Communists also overestimated the support they would receive from the South Vietnamese population during the offensive. The Communists calculated that the all-out assaults on urban areas would set the stage for a general uprising of the civilian population. However, the expected popular uprising never took place, and there was no evidence to suggest that the South Vietnamese rallied to the enemy in great numbers. In contrast, the slaughter of civilians and the destruction of private homes during the attacks only increased the population's hatred and distrust of the Communists.

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In addition, the Communists failed to destroy the Government of Vietnam (GVN) and its armed forces (RVNAF). Although its effectiveness suffered, the government did not collapse. Neither did the RVNAF falter. South Vietnamese forces sustained more than 9,000 casualties, including nearly 2,000 killed, but held up against the NVA/VC assault forces.*

Although the enemy failed to achieve its principal objectives while suffering extensive casualties, certain successes were accomplished. The attacking forces destroyed parts of many South Vietnamese cities and towns which were occupied during the offensive. The most noteworthy example was in the city of Hue where destruction to the city was estimated at about 80%. The destruction caused widespread suffering and hardship and made refugees of almost half a million South Vietnamese. The Communists did gain a propaganda and psychological victory as a result of the intensity and the degree of simultaneity of the nationwide attacks. Yet, despite these gains, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong did not win the political and military victories they wanted.

THE TACTICAL SITUATION PRIOR TO TET

In strategic terms, the Tet offensive had been anticipated by the intelligence community. Continuous indications of imminent hostile action in South Vietnam, especially in II CTZ, were reflected in

* United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967. Study Prepared by The Department of Defense. Book 5 of 12 Books.

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the intelligence product, SIGINT in particular, throughout the month of January and reported daily to tactical consumers. In tactical terms, however, the offensive came as an almost complete surprise despite the degree of advance warning provided by the intelligence community. There were four major elements of surprise. The most important was the timing of the offensive to coincide with the Tet holidays. The second was the number of simultaneous attacks executed by the enemy. The third was the primary use of Viet Cong rather than North Vietnamese and local force rather than main force units. The fourth major element of surprise was that the prime enemy targets were South Vietnamese cities and towns.

This section will discuss the indications of impending enemy attacks contained in SIGINT intelligence prior to Tet. The pre-Tet period is divided into two parts. The first part deals with enemy activity prior to 25 January 1968 when the National Security Agency published a report that warned of an imminent coordinated offensive throughout South Vietnam. The second part covers enemy activity from 25 January to the beginning of the offensive.

ENEMY ACTIVITY PRIOR TO 25 JANUARY

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Intercepted communications on 13 January provided the first significant indication of major enemy activity in Military Region 5. Reference was made to "N-Day" -- the Vietnamese Communist equivalent to "D-Day" -- in a message passed between two unidentified elements in

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Pleiku Province.*

Within a few days, SIGINT analysts noted a growing concentration of enemy elements in two separate areas in the western highlands. In the tri-border area of Kontum Province, Laos, and Cambodia, the concentration of enemy elements included Headquarters, B3 Front; Headquarters, NVA 1st Division and its Military Intelligence Section (MIS); Headquarters, NVA 1st Division's Forward Tactical Element (FTE); and the NVA 66th and 174th Regiments. On 15 January, SIGINT disclosed the movement of the NVA 32nd Regiment from Pleiku Province to the tri-border area only a few kilometers from the enemy buildup in that area.**

Another concentration of enemy elements developed in northwest Pleiku Province near the Kontum Province border and included an element of the Headquarters, B3 Front; the Gia Lai (Pleiku) Provincial Unit; the subordinate Forward Tactical Element of the NVA 1st Division; and several unidentified elements.***

* NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R12-68, 13 January 1968.

** NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R13-68, 15 January 1968.
NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R14-68, 16 January 1968.

*** NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R15-68, 17 January 1968.

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An intercepted message on 16 January between a B3 Front Headquarters authority and an NVA 1st Division Headquarters element disclosed plans for enemy attacks in Pleiku Province. Messages passed between these two headquarters played a significant part in SIGINT reporting before, during, and after the Tet offensive. According to the 16 January message, Duc Co and Le Thanh would be the initial targets while Pleiku City and areas adjoining Route 19 would be "liberated" later.*

During the next few days, these two headquarters continued to pass messages that contained references to planned attacks in Pleiku Province. Between 19 and 27 January, allied installations in the Pleiku City area sustained repeated attacks by fire.

The concentration of enemy entities in the tri-border area of Kontum Province, Laos, and Cambodia continued to grow. SIGINT noted that the Forward Element, NVA 1st Division had joined the concentration in the tri-border area by 16 January.** By 22 January, the NVA 24th Regiment had also redeployed to the tri-border area.***

In addition, a third concentration of B3 Front elements was beginning to develop in northeast Darlac Province by 24 January.

Thus, by 24 January, indications of enemy activity reflected in SIGINT suggested that attacks were imminent in the B3 Front area of

* NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 2/0/VCM/R13-68, 17 January 1968.

** NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R15-68, 17 January 1968.

*** NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R20-68, 22 January 1968.

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Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac Provinces. The major indication was the relocation and buildup of enemy units in three separate areas. Another important indication gleaned from enemy communications was the number of references to "N-Day" and attack plans discussed in messages passed between enemy elements. A third reliable indication was the increase in intelligence collection and reporting in the Dak To area of Kontum Province by Military Intelligence elements serving the NVA 1st Division.

In contrast to the abundance of evidence that pointed towards impending attacks in the B3 Front area, communications serving the NVA 3rd Division in Binh Dinh Province and the Southern Front/NVA 5th Division in Phu Yen-Khanh Hoa-Phu Bon Provinces provided only a small amount of intelligence to indicate that hostilities were forthcoming.

In the Quang Nam-Quang Tin Provinces area, SIGINT disclosed the relocation of elements of the NVA 2nd Division towards the coastal area in mid-January.* ARDF followed the movements of major combat elements of the NVA 2nd Division. The Headquarters, NVA 2nd Division deployed north into Quang Nam Province. The VC 1st Regiment also relocated to Quang Nam Province. The NVA 21st Regiment deployed south and then east towards the coast, relocating southwest of Tam Ky in Quang Tin Province.**

* NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R15-68, 17 January 1968.

** NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R20-68, 23 January 1968.

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On 24 January, NSA reported that Communist offensive operations in the coastal provinces (Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Khanh Hoa) of Military Region 5 were probable in the near future. This prediction was based on intercepted communications between Headquarters, Military Region 5 Main Force Unit Control (MFUC) and the NVA 21st Regiment on 23 January. The message, which was signed by the Chief Signal Officer of Headquarters Military Region 5 and addressed to the signal officers of all subordinate units, described the situation as tense and ordered the subordinate units to "call the watch regularly in order to receive orders and report." The message also indicated that "signal 303" had been designated as "have opened fire." The NSA report also noted that Headquarters, Military Region 5 MFUC had activated forward tactical elements in the NVA 2nd and 3rd Division areas of operations, another indication that attacks were imminent.*

By 24 January, references to "N-Day" had appeared in communications of the NVA 2nd Division, the NVA 368B and 68th Artillery Regiments, and the 402nd Sapper Battalion. References to "N-Day" in enemy communications in this area as well as in the B3 Front area provided the first indication that the forthcoming attacks were to be a coordinated effort.

The highlight of enemy activity in Military Region Tri Thien Hue (MR TTH) in early January was the emergence of the Forward Element, MR TTH as a major headquarters. By 21 January, this Forward Element

* 2/O/VCM/R27-68, 24 January 1968, POSSIBLE IMMINENT VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN COASTAL PROVINCES OF MILITARY REGION 5.

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had relocated from the Quang Tri - Thua Thien Province border area to a position about 10 kilometers from the city of Hue. It was in communications with between 8 and 10 subordinates — including the NVA 4th, 6th, and 9th Regiments.*

On 23 January, NSA warned of the renewed interest in the Hue area as shown by the disposition of enemy units in MR TTH. The Forward Element, MR TTH and the NVA 6th Regiment were positioned near Hue. In addition, the Headquarters, MR TTH had moved 10 kilometers towards Hue by 20 January. Communications activity of Headquarters, MR TTH was limited on 21 and 22 January while its Forward Element was very active in communications on those two days. These two conditions indicated a further move by Headquarters, MR TTH. The concentration of enemy units near Hue posed an increasing tactical threat to the former imperial capital.**

The two most significant developments in III CTZ prior to 25 January were the resumption of intelligence collection and reporting by Military Intelligence elements serving the VC 5th Division and the VC 9th Division and the continued expansion of communications activity by major enemy units.

Military Intelligence elements serving the VC 5th Division resumed

* NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/RO3-68, 3 January 1968.

NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R18-68, 21 January 1968.

** NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R20-68, 23 January 1968.

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intelligence collection and reporting on 6 January after having been virtually inactive since the previous September. Attention was focused on allied activities in the southern portion of Phuoc Long Province. Military Intelligence elements serving the VC 9th Division also recommenced their intelligence effort on 6 January after several weeks of inactivity. Elements of the C95 Reconnaissance Company, a subordinate of the VC 9th Division, began to conduct intelligence operations in the northeastern part of Tay Ninh Province. The 46th Sapper - Reconnaissance Battalion, a subordinate of the Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB) of COSVN, was also engaged in intelligence activities in that area.

During the month of January, several communications groups subordinate to major new control authorities continued to expand. Most of these communications groups were first activated in October of 1967. Their subscribers included elements of the VC 5th and 9th Divisions and the NVA 7th Division, the three major enemy divisions operating in III CTZ. One of these communications groups served a major front headquarters in Binh Long Province. Another was controlled by a detached element of the Headquarters, VC 5th Division. Two more groups were closely associated with the NVA 7th Division.*

Thus, by 24 January, growing evidence of imminent hostilities as reflected in enemy communications activity had been observed by

* 2/O/VCM/R10-68, 15 January 1968, SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATIONS POSSIBLY ASSOCIATED WITH VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST MAIN FORCE UNITS IN MILITARY REGIONS 1 AND 10.

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SIGINT analysts. Military Intelligence elements serving enemy tactical divisions were collecting and reporting intelligence information in several areas. The volume of tactical messages passed over enemy communications systems continued to increase, particularly in Military Region 5 where there were frequent references to "N-Day." Major North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units were relocating throughout South Vietnam, and concentrations of enemy entities were developing in several locations near large urban areas -- including the border area of Kontum Province, Cambodia, and Laos; the border area between Kontum and Pleiku Provinces; northeastern Darlac Province; southern Quang Nam Province; and in the Hue area in Thua Thien Province. In some areas, the III CTZ in particular, there was a significant expansion of the enemy's communications structure. In addition, there was an increase in the number of forward tactical elements activated by major enemy headquarters. Finally, SIGINT analysts also noted an increasing volume of urgent messages passed by both COSVN and Headquarters, Military Region 5 to their subordinate units. All of these SIGINT indicators had been noted in the past prior to major offensive activity and suggested that the enemy was preparing for an impending offensive.

On 25 January, NSA issued a report which summarized the available SIGINT intelligence and concluded that a nationwide, coordinated enemy offensive was planned for the immediate future:

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"During the past week, SIGINT has provided evidence of a coordinated attack to occur in the near future in several areas of South Vietnam. While the bulk of SIGINT evidence indicates the most critical areas to be in the northern half of the country, there is additional evidence that Communist units in Nam Bo may also be involved. The major target areas of enemy offensive operations include the western highlands, the coastal provinces of MR 5, and the Khe Sanh and Hue areas...."*

As a result of this report, the SIGINT community concentrated on developing more intelligence information regarding the offensive.

ENEMY ACTIVITY BETWEEN 25 JANUARY AND 29 JANUARY

During the period between NSA's report on 25 January and the outbreak of hostilities on the night of 29-30 January, SIGINT sources continued to provide solid evidence that a massive enemy offensive was imminent.

On 27 January, NSA issued the first of several follow-up reports to the 25 January report. Indicating that preparations for Vietnamese Communist attacks in the western highlands were reflected in the communications of Military Region 5, the follow-up report stated that:

"Through at least 27 January, SIGINT has continued to provide evidence of an impending Vietnamese Communist offensive, particularly in the western highlands area. Two messages were passed by the probable Hq, B3 Front authority to a probable NVA 1st Division element in western Pleiku Province reporting on the reinforcing of the 1st Division element and on the movement of that element to a new position...."

* 2/O/VCM/R32-68, 25 January 1960.

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In addition to the two messages between the Headquarters, B3 Front authority and an NVA 1st Division element, the report, moreover, cited a message from an unidentified B3 Front element in northeastern Pleiku Province which contained references to "N-Day" and enemy attack plans, including rocket fire in support of ground assaults and the preparation of firing positions. The report concluded that an attack was planned in northeastern Pleiku.*

SIGINT disclosed that enemy attacks were scheduled to begin on 29 January in at least two areas in Military Region 5. In the western highlands province of Kontum, Military intelligence communications showed an increased interest in the Dak To area. Messages exchanged during the period 24-26 January between the Military Intelligence Section (MIS), NVA 1st Division and a subordinate element -- located on 27 January about 12 kilometers southwest of Dak To -- indicated that enemy troops and artillery were moving. A 28 January message from the MIS, NVA 1st Division to this same subordinate revealed that the attack was to be launched at 0030 hours (GOLF) on 30 January. Using a combination of letters and digits, the MIS identified the target as "B3." This piece of SIGINT represented the first concrete evidence that attacks would take place in the western highlands during the Tet holidays and was reported to tactical consumers the day before the attacks were scheduled to begin.**

* 2/0/VCM/R36-68, FOLLOW-UP NUMBER ONE To 2/0/VCM/R32-68, 27 January 1968.

** 2/0/VCM/R40-68, FOLLOW-UP NUMBER 5 To 2/0/VCM/R32-68, 28 January 1968.

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On 27 January, the Headquarters, Military Region 5 Main Force Unit Control instructed major units operating in the coastal provinces of Military Region 5 to begin communications on additional schedules on 29 January. Such communications alerts had been noted prior to enemy offensive activity in the past and suggested that attacks would be carried out on or about 29 January in the coastal provinces of Military Region 5. The scope of the alert which involved at least three major units — Headquarters, Group 44 and the NVA 2nd and 3rd Divisions — indicated that the attacks would be widespread.*

In ARVN III and IV CTZ's, there were several significant developments between 25 and 29 January which indicated an increased level of enemy offensive activity. The VC 9th Division, which had resumed communications with its subordinate regiments on 19 January, passed a number of tactical messages to the VC 271st Regiment between 25 and 28 January. This increase in the volume of traffic reflected a possible move by the VC 271st Regiment in preparation for early tactical employment.**

COSVN continued to transmit an unusually high volume of urgent messages to major enemy headquarters — including Headquarters, Military Region 2; Headquarters, VC 5th Division; and Headquarters, Military Region 10. SIGINT analysts observed that many of these messages contained instructions to "decrypt immediately." In addition, SIGINT

* 2/0/VCM/R37-68, FOLLOW-UP NUMBER 2 To 2/0/VCM/R32-68, 28 January 1968.

** NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R24-68, 28 January 1968.

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showed that the Military Intelligence Section, Binh Long Front in Binh Long Province had moved approximately 30 kilometers south between 19 and 26 January. The MIS had previously been located in the Binh Long - Cambodian border area. The movement placed the MIS in the west - central part of the province. On 29 January, the MIS, Binh Long Front resumed communications with the Military Intelligence Bureau, COSVN for the first time in over a month.

In IV CTZ, the major development in enemy communications was the extremely high volume of messages exchanged between the Alternate Headquarters, Military Region 2 and the VC 261st Battalion and My Tho Provincial Unit in western Dinh Tuong Province. In addition, a concentration of enemy units in Dinh Tuong Province was developing approximately 35 kilometers from My Tho, the province capital. The VC 261st and 263rd Battalions, the My Tho Provincial Unit, and the Forward Element, Alternate Headquarters, Military Region 2 were identified as part of this concentration.*

Thus, growing evidence of offensive activity throughout South Vietnam was reflected in the communications activity of major enemy units prior to the actual outbreak of hostilities. SIGINT indicators which had often preceded offensive activity in the past were noted by SIGINT analysts prior to the beginning of the 1968 Tet offensive. These SIGINT indicators included but were not limited to;

* NSA Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary, 3/0/STY/R25-68, 29 January 1968.

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1. The activation of forward tactical elements by major enemy units.
2. The development of concentrations of enemy entities, particularly near main populated areas and allied installations.
3. The implementation of tactical signal plans.
4. The implementation of communications alerts as shown by increases in volume and frequency of message traffic.
5. An increase in collection and reporting by Military Intelligence elements serving major enemy units.
6. An increase in readable messages.

One of the most noticeable SIGINT indicators was the movement and buildup of enemy units near South Vietnamese cities and towns during the month of January. Between 30 December 1967 and 30 January 1968, enemy forces deployed from the borders and sparsely settled areas and moved towards the cities and towns. By 30 January, the main populated areas were surrounded by enemy forces.*

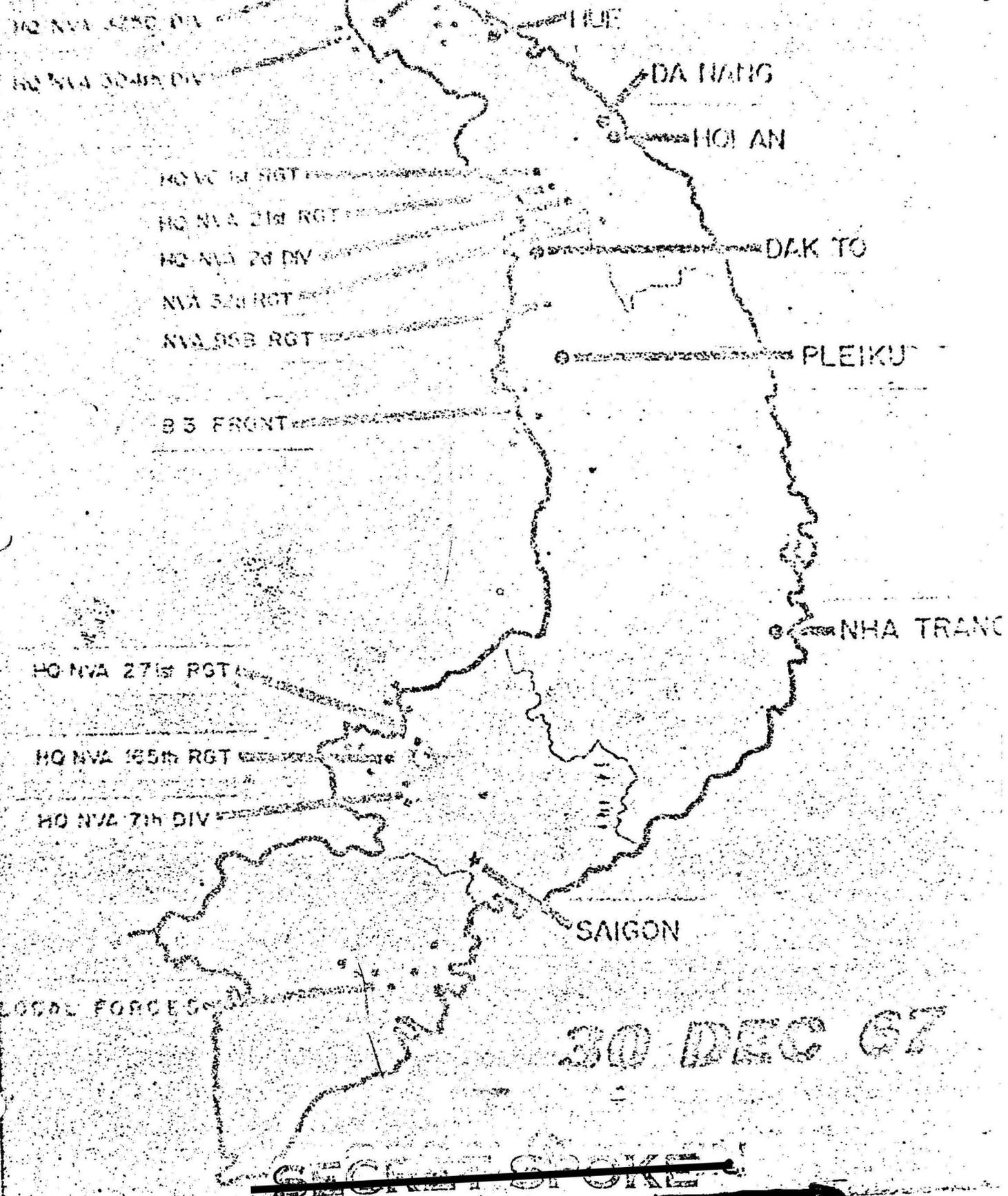
In Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue, several of these indicators were reflected in SIGINT, including the activation of the Forward Element, Headquarters, MR TTH and the buildup of NVA/VC units near the city of Hue. The use of a tactical signal plan by enemy units in the Hue area, however, was not reflected in SIGINT until after the attack against the former imperial capital had been initiated. In the B3 Front area, read-

* See map, Disposition of Enemy Forces on 30 December 1967, P. 35.

See map, Disposition of Enemy Forces on 30 January 1968, P. 36.

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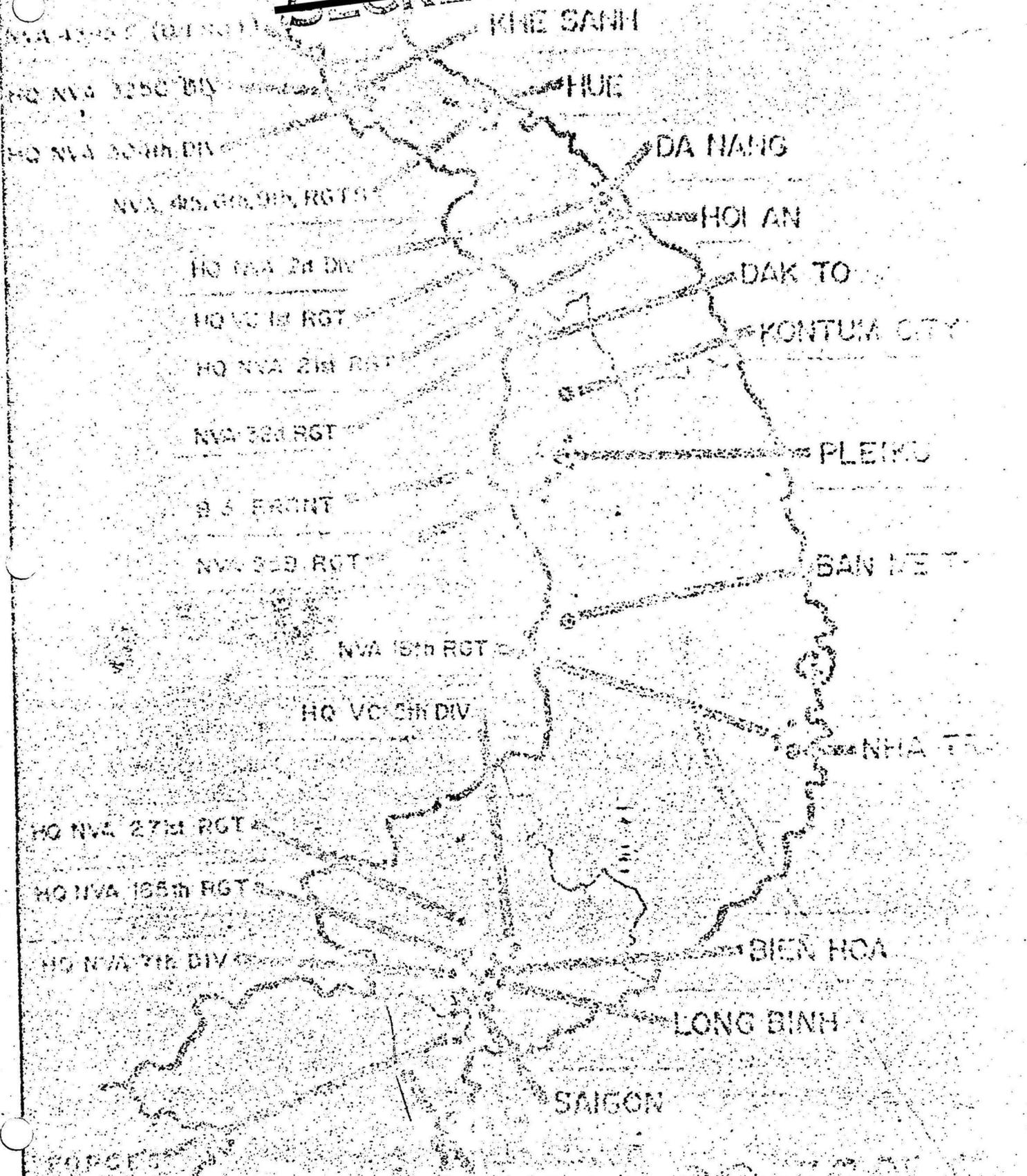
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able messages regarding enemy attack plans and preparations for battle, the activation of several forward tactical elements, and concentrations of enemy entities in at least four separate areas provided evidence which indicated that attacks were imminent. In addition, an increase in activity by Military Intelligence elements was also observed in the Duc Co and Dak To areas. In the coastal provinces of Military Region 5, forthcoming attacks were suggested by the relocation and buildup of enemy units along the coast. Other SIGINT indicators included intercepted messages which contained references to attack plans, the activation of forward tactical elements, and the implementation of a scheduled tactical signal plan by elements of the NVA 2nd Division on 30 January.

In III CTZ, SIGINT indicators were also noted and reported to tactical consumers. Control stations that served Forward Tactical Elements of the VC 5th Division and the NVA 7th Division were established. Concentrations of enemy units appeared in three provinces -- Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, and Bien Hoa. The reappearance of several communications links which had been inactive suggested that a communications alert had been effected. After several weeks of inactivity, Military Intelligence elements serving the VC 5th and 9th Divisions resumed intelligence collection and reporting in early January. On 25 January, the VC 9th Division began to pass tactical messages to its subordinate 271st Regiment. The week prior to Tet, COSVN began to exchange messages of high precedence with major enemy headquarters in II, III, and IV CTZ's.

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In IV CTZ, ARDF fixed a concentration of Viet Cong units 35 kilometers from the provincial capital of My Tho, one of the prime VC targets in IV CTZ during the Tet offensive. One of the units identified in this concentration was the Forward Tactical Element, Alternate Headquarters, Military Region 2.

SIGINT was able to provide indications that enemy attacks were forthcoming in each of the four Corps areas. Although SIGINT did forecast the increased level of offensive activity, it failed to predict the unprecedented nature and scope of the attacks. The use of local force units and main force units of battalion size or smaller in the first wave of attacks reduced SIGINT's effectiveness since it was difficult to maintain continuity on the sporadic communications of such units. The effectiveness of SIGINT was dependent on the intercept and analysis of enemy communications. SIGINT did not show what the enemy did not communicate.

SIGINT SUPPORT TO ALLIED TACTICAL FORCES DURING TET

While SIGINT did portray the enemy buildup and tactical threat prior to Tet, it was also used by commanders to plan and conduct allied reactions to the enemy attacks and subsequent counter operations. The contributions of the SIGINT community played a vital role in the success achieved by allied forces over the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong during the offensive. The effectiveness of SIGINT support was demonstrated by U.S. tactical operations against NVA/VC units in

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I and II CTZ.

In Phu Yen Province, the 404th Radio Research Detachment predicted that an assault on the city of Tuy Hoa would be conducted by at least three battalions of the NVA 25th Regiment. This prediction was made three days before the actual attack on 30 January. Because of this intelligence, the detachment's supported tactical command, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, was fully prepared to meet the expected attack. The results of the ensuing battle were devastating. The attacking force failed to capture its objective while suffering heavy casualties. North Vietnamese losses totalled 590 killed.*

In Quang Nam Province, the Americal Radio Research Company furnished SIGINT intelligence which showed the enemy's intent to attack the city of Hoi An during Tet. In response to this intelligence, elements of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade and the 198th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division conducted Task Force MIRACLE between 8 February and 15 February. U.S. troops were inserted in the area where SIGINT had located the VC 1st Regiment and subsequently established contact with enemy forces. The results of this engagement were 308 Viet Cong killed. In addition, SIGINT located the NVA 21st Regiment, another major subordinate of the NVA 2nd Division, near Go Noi Island. The Americal Division responded to this intelligence by deploying forces to the area. The enemy regiment was badly defeated and sustained approximately 236 casualties. Both of these allied combat operations, which

* Annual Historical Report, 313th RR Bn, FY 1968, Volume II, P. 36.

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were based on intelligence provided by SIGINT sources, thwarted the enemy's efforts to capture Hoi An City during the Tet offensive.*

Another example was the support rendered by the 138th Aviation Company to Task Force X-RAY in the Hue area. In a letter dated 2 May 1968 to the 138th Aviation Company, MG John N. McLaughlin, commander of Task Force X-RAY, stated that:

During the Tet offensive, and operation "Hue City" which followed, the intelligence received from your unit (the 138th Aviation Company at Da Nang Airfield with one flight detachment operating from the 8th Radio Research Field Station at Phu Bai) was extremely instrumental in troop disposition and targeting of both artillery and tactical air strikes on enemy held positions. Results of targeting were numerous secondary explosions, causing both destruction to the enemy forces, and depriving him of many storage caches.**

In a letter to the Commanding Officer, 138th Aviation Company, the Commanding Officer, 8th Radio Research Field Station further explained the support provided by the 138th Aviation Company to allied tactical units in the Hue area:

Through the efforts of the 138th, SIGINT was also able to follow the southerly deployment of the 324B NVA Division. This division, along with its subordinate 90th, 803d, and 812th Regiments, deployed along a supply/logistics corridor extending from the DMZ into the Thua Thien area. During January and

* Annual Historical Report, 313th RR Bn, FY 1968, Volume II, PP. 35-36.

** Annual Historical Report, 224th Avn Bn (RR), FY 1968, Volume II, PP. 14-15.

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February 1968, continuity on the infiltration of these elements into the Hue-Phu Bai area would have been virtually impossible without the assistance provided by the 138th. These NVA units continue to be located in the Hue-Phu Bai area. As a result, the 1st Marine Division, 1st Air Cav Division, the 101st Airborne Division, 3/82d Airborne Division, and the 196th Light Infantry Brigade conducted operations based on the current locations of these units. Without the support of the 138th, these and other Allied elements currently operating in this area would have to operate with less significant intelligence and below maximum efficiency.

Prior to, during, and after the "Battle of Hue," the 138th provided invaluable support to U.S. operational elements in the Hue area. The 138th supplied SIGINT locations which were highly instrumental in uncovering a major NVA/VC "staging area" southwest of Hue City. This "staging area" was utilized by NVA/VC forces prior to the commencement of the "Battle of Hue" and as a re-grouping area immediately thereafter. The "staging area" subsequently came under extensive B-52 strikes. It is felt that these attacks deprived the enemy of a rest and resupply area and probably restricted the massing of NVA/VC forces for another large offensive against the civilian population and military forces....*

Intelligence information, SIGINT in particular, was also an integral factor in General Westmoreland's decisions to cancel the planned Tet truce in I CTZ on 25 January and to place U.S. forces on full alert throughout South Vietnam on 30 January before the main wave of attacks. The alert status enabled U.S. forces to meet the attacks and diminish the element of surprise which the enemy hoped to achieve. As a result, the assaults on the cities and towns were repulsed, and the attacking forces were badly defeated.

* Annual Historical Report, 224th Avn Bn (RR), FY 1968, Volume II, PP. 15-16.

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SUMMARY AND LESSONS LEARNED

Intelligence sources were criticized for not providing sufficient information regarding the Tet offensive. However, there was no evidence to support this charge. On 7 June 1968, the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board issued a memorandum for the President which showed the results of its investigation into the alleged "intelligence failure" which occurred at the time of the Tet offensive. The memorandum stated that:

....Throughout January, 1968 the intelligence apparatus was filled with indications that the enemy was preparing for a series of coordinated attacks on a larger scale than ever before attempted. Considering each corps area separately, the clearest advance warnings directed attention to the likelihood of attacks in I Corps, the Kontum-Pleiku areas of II Corps, and the vicinity of Saigon in III Corps. In IV Corps, the US intelligence apparatus received virtually no advance indications of the nature and extent of the attacks which occurred....

On the question of the lack of intelligence concerning the timing, extent, and nature of the offensive, the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board reported that:

....With regard to the timing of the enemy's offensive, most of the intelligence evaluators concluded that the offensive most likely would occur just prior to or immediately following the Tet holiday period which extended from January 27 to February 3, 1968. A few of the evaluators in the field, including General Westmoreland, included in their estimates the specific possibility that the offensive might take place during the Tet holidays. While some reports suggested the possibility of

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simultaneous attacks in certain areas the Board found none predicting the extent of the attacks which actually occurred or the degree of simultaneity achieved in their execution.

In the intelligence available in the pre-Tet period, many of the cities, towns, and installations actually attacked were mentioned as possible targets. The Board finds little in the pre-Tet intelligence suggesting that the country-wide attacks might concentrate on the cities and towns to the virtual exclusion of frontier targets or that the enemy might seek to establish lodgement in these urban areas and foment uprisings. The expectation seems to have been that the harassment of the cities and towns would be confined largely to mortar and rocket attacks, rather than the ground attacks which actually took place....

Based on the findings of its investigation, the Board concluded:

a. that the intelligence at hand contributed to the decision on 25 January to cancel the Tet truce in I Corps and to General Westmoreland's action on 30 January putting US commanders on full alert throughout South Vietnam just prior to the main attacks;

b. that intelligence contributed substantially to the result that the attacks on the cities were beaten off and that no permanent lodgements were achieved;

c. that the intelligence bearing on the Tet offensive proved adequate in that it alerted US commanders in time to permit them to carry out their missions successfully and, therefore, there are no grounds to support the charge of a major intelligence failure;....

In retrospect, two important lessons learned from the 1968 Tet offensive were the need for more in-depth analysis of enemy communications and the need for more integration of collateral information with SIGINT intelligence. Major Robert L. Kennedy, who was assigned to the J-2 Special Projects Section at USMACV Headquarters from July

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1967 to June 1968, touched upon these problems in an interview:

The inability to detect the nature of the Tet offensive more specifically from SIGINT resulted, apparently, from a lack of in-country intensive in-depth analysis of enemy communications activity to relate unusual activity to the forthcoming attacks against the cities. No one adequately correlated various, numerous SIGINT facts from the four CTZ's in RVN into a countrywide picture. The SIGINT system's major shortcoming was its inability to treat the enemy's total activity and relate the parts to the whole. The SIGINT system was not taking the long-look at communications activity occurring over one or two months. Apparently, pressure on NSA for reporting on current activity prevented them from performing adequate in-depth analysis, and there was no in-country capability — such as a processing company deployed normally with an ASA Group — to integrate sufficiently RVN-wide COMINT from the different sources....If sufficient analytic capability had existed, an increased amount of more useful, real-time tactical intelligence could have been furnished to commands....No practical procedures existed to provide regular timely receipt and distribution of collateral information for use by SI analysts. Thus, analysts operated in a void, without a real capability to correlate pertinent, current, collateral intelligence. The use of collateral with SIGINT could have led to much greater break-out of lower level enemy headquarters, nets organizations, and unit identifications. This, in turn, would have permitted continuity coverage on more units such as VC LF and MF units and NVA/VC bns. These units conducted most of the continual tactical actions against U.S./ARVN forces.*

In conclusion, advance warning of the Tet offensive was provided by the SIGINT community to allied commanders. Evidence of forthcoming attacks was reflected in enemy communications activity prior to the actual attacks. The buildup of enemy forces near main populated areas

* USASA Historical Interview with Major Robert L. Kennedy, MI, 01922789, on 24 March 1970 conducted by Wolfe at HQ, USASA.

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and other SIGINT indicators which had preceded Vietnamese Communist offensive operations in the past indicated that the enemy was preparing for major offensive activity. SIGINT played a highly significant role in portraying the enemy threat and alerting the allied commanders throughout South Vietnam to the possibility of imminent attacks. As a result, allied tactical forces were able to repulse the assaults and inflict a major military defeat on the enemy.

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