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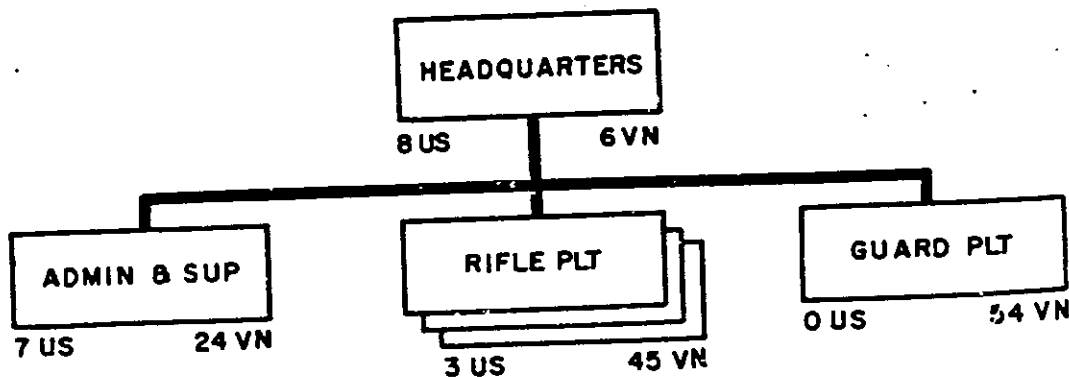
unit operations. They also participated in various specialized training programs which included basic airborne training, high altitude low opening (HALO) airborne training, long range patrolling, night movement, helicopter rappelling, airmobile operations, and the use of the STABO personnel harness for inserting and extracting individuals from inaccessible areas by helicopters.

(C) SMF's US contingent was not an advisory element, but actually commanded and led the indigenous soldiers. SMF was organized into three platoons under a force headquarters element and an administrative section (Fig. 1-10). Each US platoon leader had a counterpart indigenous platoon leader. All command decisions, however, both in the rear area and in the field, were the responsibility of the US platoon leader. A US major commanded SMF, supported by a Montagnard counterpart, a highly respected former tribal chieftain. SMF did not experience the attrition among indigenous troops one would expect to find in a similar US

unit. Personnel retainability was unique in that there was no specific termination of service for the indigenous soldier. A Montagnard's assignment with SMF normally terminated only if he absented himself without leave or if he elected to terminate his service.

(C) The initial emphasis, following the reorganization of the Golf 5 Security Company was to train SMF personnel to perform the missions they had been tasked to execute on a contingency basis. One of these missions was to perform crash site inspections. Prior to the SMF activation the Golf 5 Security Company had been tasked with crash site inspection and remains recovery missions on two separate occasions, following the crashes of a China Air Lines flight carrying 32 personnel and a Cathay Pacific flight carrying 82 personnel. There were no survivors in either crash. Many of the techniques and procedures of SMF's crash site SOPs were derived from the methods used by Golf 5 during these missions. Most of the personnel assigned to

SPECIAL MISSION FORCE



Total: US personnel 18
VN personnel 129

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the Golf 5 Security Company subsequently formed the nucleus of SMF.

(C) In order to insure that the level of combat training and special operations techniques were consistent throughout the force, SMF began an intensive, two week training program as soon as the Pleiku compound was occupied and the personnel organized under the new Joint Table of Distribution. This was followed by a second two week block of field training and, on 23 August 1972, actual operations. This rapid transition from formation to combat operations did not impair SMF's

responsiveness to a variety of missions. Reconnaissance missions were conducted in Military Region 1 and 2 with single squads, platoons, and the entire force. Two additional crash site inspections further clarified techniques which would prove useful to post cease-fire crash site search operations.¹⁰ The quality of the Special Mission Force showed best in combat, where the indigenous soldier proved his excellence as a jungle fighter.¹¹

(U) The Special Mission Force was deactivated and disbanded on 5 March 1973; indigenous troops returned to their villages.

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STRATEGIC TECHNICAL DIRECTORATE ASSISTANCE TEAM-158

ANNEX-I -

1. Rpt (TS), STDAT-158, 7 Feb 73, Subj: Command History 1 May 1972-March 1973 (U), p 1. GDS-Exempt.
2. Ibid., p 2.
3. Ibid., p 4.
4. Ibid., p 5.
5. Ibid., p 8.
6. Ibid., p 27.
7. Ibid., p 29.
8. Ibid., p 43.
9. Ibid., p 44.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p 60.
12. Ibid., p 66.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p 78.
15. Ibid., p 90.
16. Ibid., p 95.
17. Ibid., p 98.
18. Ibid., pp 105, 119.
19. Ibid., p 112.

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ANNEX J

AN LOC

(C) The NGUYEN HUE Offensive of 1972 began on 30 March with the invasion of northern Military Region 1, Republic of Vietnam. Within a week, the component of the offensive in Military Region 3, which included Saigon, began to unfold. The enemy campaign caught the friendly forces in the area by surprise. Intelligence reports during March indicated that there was little likelihood of an enemy offensive on the scale of that in Military Region 1. While there was the possibility of increased activity near Tay Ninh City, the reports placed great reliance in the ability of allied cross-border operations in Cambodia to keep the enemy divisions busy defending their lines of communication. Critically, there was a lack of mention about the presence of enemy armored forces in the area of Military Region 3. There was no indication that an attack might be mounted on the towns along Route 13, the main route of approach to Saigon from the north. The overall evaluation of the situation was that enemy forces in the Republic retained the ability to conduct battalion size attacks and guerrilla, terrorist, propaganda, and sapper activities. Although multibattalion attacks were considered to be possible in the B-3 Front (Kon Tum, Pleiku, and Da Nang Provinces), they were not expected in Military Region 3. This misreading of enemy capabilities as well as intentions seriously affected the level of readiness of friendly forces in the Region (Fig. J-1).

(C) Not until the offensive had been blunted in Military Region 3 were intelligence agencies able to determine what had happened. During the allied operations in Cambodia around the Chup-Dambe areas in November and December 1971, the 5th VC Division had been located between Kruk and Snoul. The mission of this enemy force was to prevent the 5th ARVN Division from moving into this area and to resist other ARVN elements attempting to sweep east of the Dambe area. In late December the 5th VC Division had established its base area near Snoul, Cambodia, which is the first significant Cambodian town along Route 13 as it crosses the border. From January through March 1972 this division was refitted and retrained.

(C) In February and March 1972 the 7th NVA Division and the 9th VC Division were refitting and retraining in the Cambodian areas of Dambe and Chup respectively. In late March, documents captured in Tay Ninh Province revealed that ele-

ments of the 9th VC Division were planning to move to Base Area 708 in the vicinity of the Fishhook on or about 24 March. Part of the division was to assemble in a staging area in the southwest portion of the base area. To the east of that location in western Binh Long Province elements of the 272d VC Regiment would assemble where part of the 96C NVA Regiment had already moved. Another unidentified unit was in position north of Camp Tonle Cham and Route 244. The captured documents also indicated that coordination between the 7th NVA Division and the 9th VC Division was possible and that all elements of the 9th VC Division had been trained in urban warfare. The three battalions of the 272d VC Regiment were listed as having received additional training against selected targets.

(C) The objectives of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong NGUYEN HUE Offensive were to destroy ARVN forces through military victories, to disrupt the Vietnamization and pacification programs, thus "liberating" the countryside, and finally, to take over the government of South Vietnam. To accomplish these objectives in Military Region 3 the enemy developed a complicated tactical plan. The 24th and 271st Independent NVA Regiments were ordered to conduct diversionary attacks against elements of the 25th ARVN Division in northern Tay Ninh Province. This diversion masked the movement of the 7th NVA and 9th VC Divisions through Base Area 708 and into Binh Long Province (Fig. J-2). The 9th VC Division, considered to be the elite division of the enemy force, was assigned the mission to attack and capture An Loc, preferably within five days but not more than ten. A command headquarters for South Vietnam was to be established at the new Communist capital at An Loc on 20 April 1972.

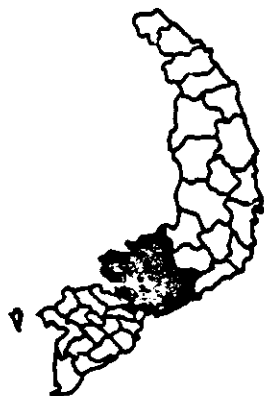
(C) While the 9th VC Division was moving to accomplish this mission, the 7th NVA Division was given the responsibility to block Route 13 between An Loc and Lai Khe to the south and to stop all traffic from reaching or leaving An Loc by road. The 5th VC Division was assigned the mission to move into northern Binh Long Province and attack and capture Loc Ninh. When Loc Ninh had fallen, the 5th VC Division was to coordinate an attack with the 24th and 271st Independent NVA Regiments to isolate the 25th ARVN Division by 1 May. Subsequently, these forces were charged with isolat-

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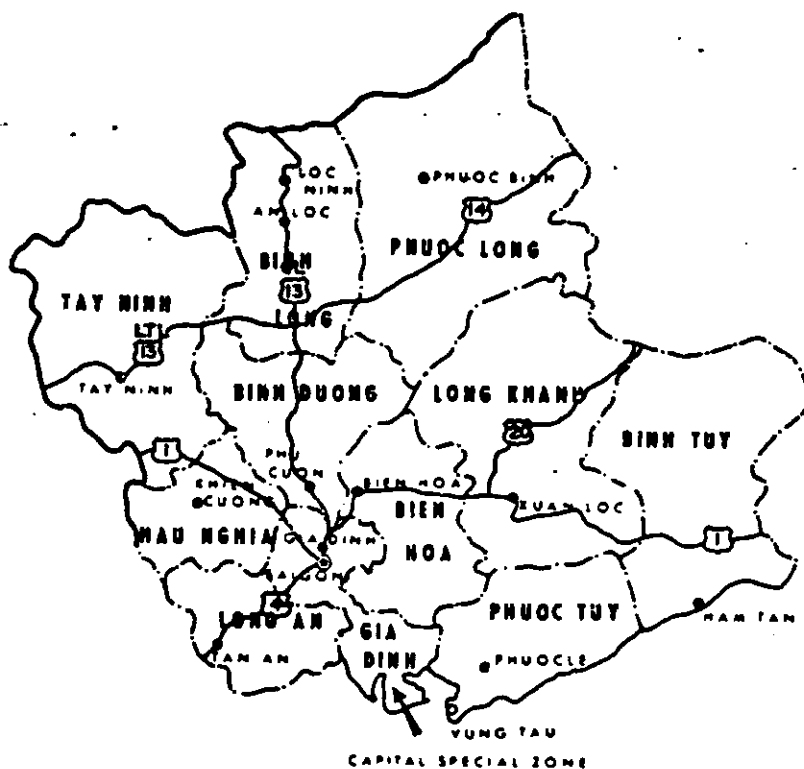
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MILITARY REGION 3



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ing the remainder of Tay Ninh Province. The general concept for this maneuver was for the 5th VC Division to redeploy from the Loc Ninh area and attack Tri Tam. Simultaneously, the two independent NVA regiments would attack into Hau Nghia and Tay Ninh Provinces from the Parrot's Beak to cut Route 1.

(C) After the common government had been established by mid-May, the 7th NVA Division, 9th VC Division, 69th Artillery Command, 202d Tank Regiment, and the 293d Tank Regiment were to attack down Route 13 and the Saigon River Corridor and capture Saigon. Finally, the Thu Bien Subsector and 429th Sapper Group were to attack Bien Hoa. These enemy plans were completely disrupted by the costly attack at Loc Ninh and the failure to capture An Loc, but in the meantime, the enemy set the initial phases of his plan in motion.²

(C) The first significant enemy contact in Military Region 3 occurred early on the morning of 2 April. The enemy attacked the ARVN Fire Support Base Lac Long along Route 20, 35 kilometers northwest of Tay Ninh City, in the Dog's Head area of the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. Formerly called Fire Support Base Pace, the base was overrun within several hours by a regimental size enemy assault. Contributing to the surprise of the defenders was the employment of tanks in support of the enemy attack. Previous intelligence reports had given no warning that the enemy had a tank capability in the area. The fire support base, defended by the 1st Battalion, 49th ARVN Regiment, suffered ten killed, 44 wounded, and 22 missing, in addition to significant losses in weapons and equipment. Although the enemy force was not identified in the confusion of the battle, it was probably either the 24th or the 371st NVA Independent Regiment.³

(U) After the capture of Lac Long the enemy forces continued their move and forced the evacuation of the ARVN fire support base at Thien Ngon on Route 22, leading into Tay Ninh City from the northeast. The enemy ambushed the withdrawing ARVN elements but did not follow these successes with a thrust against the province capital. The loss of Thien Ngon was more critical than the loss of Lac Long because it guarded the approaches to Tay Ninh City. There was a clear path into the capital had the enemy wished to continue his advance. The failure to press this advantage in Tay Ninh Province was an early indication that this move was a feint, although it was not recognized clearly at the time.⁴

(C) Although the ARVN forces in Military Region 3 had been surprised by the enemy attacks at Lac Long and Thien Ngon, and particularly by the

presence of enemy armor, they reacted against what appeared to be a threat against Tay Ninh which was thirty kilometers to the south of the abandoned fire support base. The 25th ARVN Division organized a relief force composed of the 2d Battalion, 49th Regiment, and the 32d, 43d, and 44th Ranger Battalions. In the confusion of the opening days of the campaign, the mission of this force was not clear. MG James F. Hollingsworth, Commanding General, Third Regional Assistance Command (TRAC), advised GEN Creighton Abrams, COMUSMACV, that he did not know whether this force was to link up with the remnants of the ARVN troops that had been driven from Lac Long or to reoccupy the fire base.⁵

(C) In any case, the actions of the 25th ARVN Division relief force were irrelevant to the enemy offensive in Military Region 3. The attack against the fire base was a diversionary attack, intended to draw allied attention from the area of Route 13. There appears to have been little purpose in that operation on the part of the enemy unless that was his goal. There was no serious attempt on the part of the enemy to continue toward Tay Ninh City, nor was there any effort to maintain continuous occupation of the captured fire support base.

(C) For several days after this initial move against friendly forces in Military Region 3, there was a general lull in the level of enemy activity. However, there were indications of increased enemy activity in the 5th ARVN Division area of operations, particularly around Loc Ninh and An Loc, the northernmost towns on Route 13. The 5th Division advisors received reports of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese operating in squad, platoon, and company formations during the period 1 to 3 April. TRAC Headquarters, however, continued to place its emphasis on the situation in Tay Ninh Province, in which Fire Support Base Lac Long was located. Attempts to recover the fire base met with some resistance, and a captured North Vietnamese soldier revealed that the main force enemy element in the Tay Ninh area was the 7th NVA Division.⁶

(U) The enemy operations around Loc Ninh and An Loc in these first days of April were apparently reconnaissance efforts. In addition, some enemy attempts had been made to turn the workers in the Terres Rouges Plantation area against the South Vietnamese government representatives in Binh Long Province where both towns were located. On 4 April there began a lull in this type of enemy activity throughout Military Region 3. Probably the enemy was moving into his final positions around Loc Ninh, just before the assault on that district town (Fig. J-3).

J-3

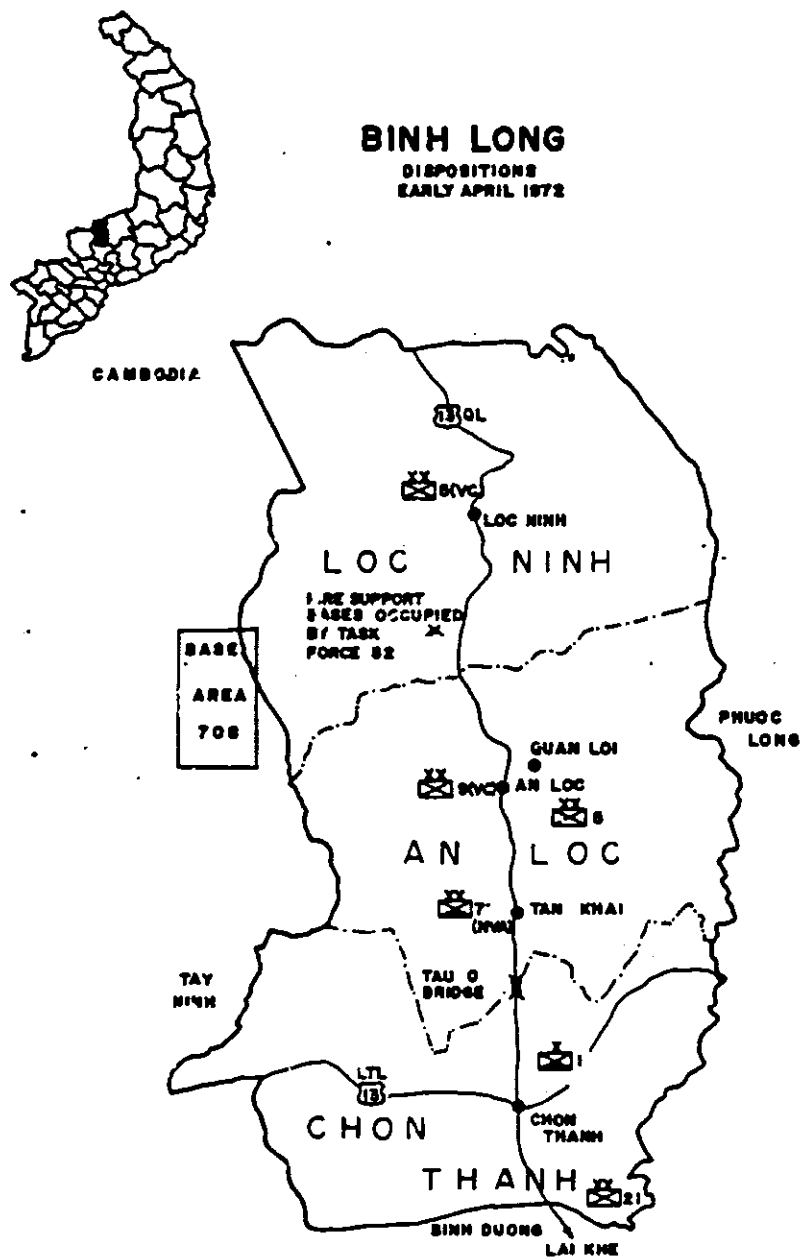
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THE ATTACK ON LOC NINH

(U) The attack on Loc Ninh was the prelude to the siege of An Loc. What happened at Loc Ninh is difficult to determine; there were few survivors and most of the American advisory detachment was killed or captured. Although the enemy's 7th NVA Division had been identified coming through Tay Ninh Province, the enemy forces in Binh Long Province remained unidentified for several days after the beginning of the attack on Loc Ninh. Not until the siege of An Loc were friendly forces able to discover the size and unit designation of the hostile forces besieging them.

(U) To meet the enemy attack on Loc Ninh, the 5th ARVN Division had the 9th Regiment together with an attached armored cavalry squadron (minus one APC troop) and an attached ranger battalion. At the beginning of the attack, these forces were dispersed. Since there had been no warning that Loc Ninh was an enemy objective, the commander of the 9th Regiment had assigned search missions to the bulk of his force. The attack on the morning of 5 April defeated in detail these forces around Loc Ninh.⁴

(C) The battle of Loc Ninh began in the early morning hours of 5 April. At 0400 hours TRAC Headquarters received a report from the 5th ARVN Division that enemy armor had been heard south-west of Loc Ninh moving east toward Route 13. This was the first warning that the 5th ARVN Division faced a force of significant strength and size. At 0650 hours the enemy began shelling the headquarters of the 9th Regiment and the Loc Ninh Subsector Headquarters compound. Soon thereafter, Loc Ninh was subjected to heavy ground attack from the west. Several times the enemy was in the wire before being forced back. The next day MG Hollingsworth reported to GEN Abrams that he estimated the force to have been the size of a reinforced regiment. There were confirmed reports of 60mm and 82mm mortar fires and 107mm rocket fires. There were also reports that 108mm howitzers were being used by the enemy, but these were unconfirmed. Some confusion existed as to whether tanks had been used in the first day's fighting, but it appears that at least one tank was knocked out by direct fire from the ARVN artillery with the 9th Regiment.⁵

(U) The fighting at Loc Ninh was fierce. American advisors on the ground made extensive use of tactical air strikes. MG Hollingsworth singled out CPT "Zippe" Smith in particular for praise as a result of his effective and brilliant fire direction. In another attempt to break the developing enemy stronghold, the 1st Cavalry task force with two companies of the 2d Battalion, 9th Regiment, attached, was ordered to attack toward the city from its positions north of Loc Ninh. The lead elements of the task force made contact with the encircling enemy just to the north of the beleaguered village. Early in the afternoon, radio contact with the cavalry was lost. It faded from the remainder of the conflict at Loc Ninh, having no influence on the outcome of the battle.⁶

(C) Heavy enemy pressure against Loc Ninh continued through the fifth of April. To the south-east of the town, the enemy had reinforced his attacking elements by noon and launched major ground attacks. During one of the afternoon assaults, enemy elements attempted a westward crossing of the Loc Ninh runway, which was stopped by well-placed air strikes using CBU's. As the fighting raged, another enemy assault which had succeeded in getting into the wire on the east side of the 9th Regiment's command post was cut down by helicopter gunships. By nightfall the situation had stabilized, and MG Hollingsworth felt that most of the attacking enemy regiment had been killed.

(C) Early on the morning of 6 April, however, the enemy brought up his armor. The defenders of Loc Ninh heard the tanks at the southern end of the runway. Shortly thereafter, an enemy infantry assault succeeded in getting into the wire, and tanks joined the attack from the northwest and southeast at about 0830 hours. The battle continued for another two hours, sawsawing back and forth. MG Hollingsworth observed tanks in groups of seven and eight being beaten back on five occasions. The enemy forces were too strong for the defenders, however, and at 0745 hours the camp was overrun. "Those on the ground at Loc Ninh fought gallantly against insurmountable odds to include 25 to 30 tanks," Hollingsworth later reported to GEN Abrams. "Dauntless and remarkable courage kept them going."⁷

THE SIEGE — PHASE I

(C) During the last day of the battle at Loc Ninh, MG Hollingsworth became increasingly concerned about the state of readiness throughout the remainder of Military Region 3. In a message to

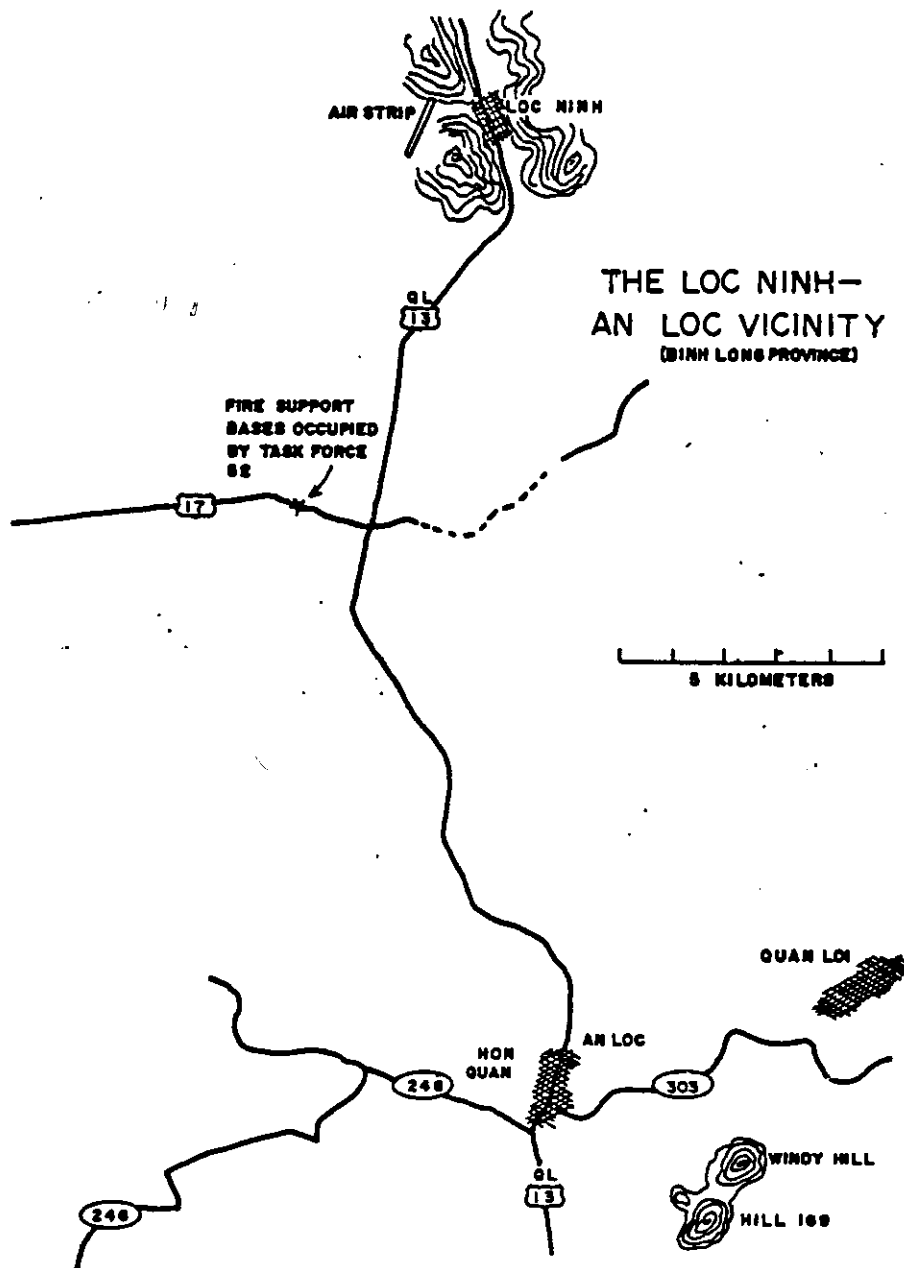
all American elements in the region he warned, "Situation in Binh Long Province has taken a turn for worse." He reported that Loc Ninh had probably fallen and observed that the likelihood was

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that the enemy would continue his momentum south astride Route 13. Noting that there were unconfirmed ARVN reports that the enemy planned to take Tay Ninh Province and make a major move on Saigon, the general wrote, "Considering enemy successes at Loc Ninh we must be prepared." He then gave directions based upon his observations of the enemy attack on Loc Ninh. "All US elements and personnel in Military Region 3 will immediately check and improve defensive positions to insure that they are in best possible condition to withstand heavy attacks-by-fire and possible direct fire from 76mm tank guns." With foresight that proved critical at An Loc, Hollingsworth continued, "Commanders will secure all possible anti-tank weapons, insure that people are assigned to employ them and that those assigned know how to fire them properly." He then placed the entire region on yellow alert status.¹¹

(C) As the battle at Loc Ninh unfolded, LTG Minh, commanding III Corps, realized that the main enemy effort was not to be in Tay Ninh, but rather in Binh Long Province. Loc Ninh was the northernmost town of significance in the province. In addition to its political importance as a district town, Loc Ninh also guarded the northern portion of Route 13, a major approach to Saigon. The next town to the south was An Loc, province capital of Binh Long and a major center of latex rubber production for the Republic of Vietnam. Minh also realized that the enemy wished to seize Binh Long to effect a direct approach to Saigon. Unable to save Loc Ninh, he decided to reinforce An Loc and attempt to stop the enemy advance to the national capital. A successful defense of An Loc would also deprive the enemy of the psychological advantage of capturing a provincial capital close to Saigon.¹²

(C) LTG Minh's decision to hold at An Loc was a wise one. Later intelligence evaluation confirmed that during the first week of April, while the 5th VC Division was surrounding and attacking Loc Ninh, the 9th VC Division was moving into position around An Loc. Minh hurried to Saigon on 7 April and demanded more troops to make up the losses suffered in the initial engagements. He informed the Vietnamese National Security Council that the enemy offensives in Military Regions 1 and 2 were diversionary and that Saigon was the real target. He reported to the council that there was the equivalent of four enemy divisions in the III Corps area. Initially his arguments seemed to go unheeded, and he was dismissed while the other corps commanders remained within the Council. Later in the day, however, he was recalled and told that the 21st ARVN Division from Military Region 4 was

assigned to him, as well as the 1st Airborne Brigade, a part of the general reserve force.

(C) The next day MG Hollingsworth reported that he had urged LTG Minh to move the airborne brigade to An Loc immediately. Minh did not do this in time to meet the first major assault. Instead the airborne battalions were used to drive up Route 13 from Lai Khe through Chon Thanh toward the roadblock. They were followed by the 21st Division. When Minh did not reinforce An Loc with the airborne brigade, Hollingsworth warned GEN Abrams that "An Loc will fall and it will be clear sailing into Lai Khe."¹³

(U) LTG Minh probably did not move the airborne brigade into An Loc at this point because he had inserted the 3d Ranger Group of two battalions the day before. He may also have been worried not only about the threat to An Loc but also the threat to Saigon if An Loc fell and no forces were to the south along Route 13 to block their way. In addition, the roadblock between Lai Khe and An Loc needed to be cleared so that reinforcement and resupply of the town would not remain dependent upon air power.

(U) The enemy also realized the critical position of An Loc as the key to a successful move on Saigon. While the battle at Loc Ninh was in progress, enemy forces conducted attacks on Quan Lai, a large helicopter rearming and refueling point six kilometers to the east of An Loc. The ARVN forces defending the airfield were able to hold out for a time. Between An Loc and Loc Ninh, the two battalions Task Force 52 was also brought under enemy attack. Most critical of all the enemy actions, however, was the establishment on 6 April of a roadblock south of An Loc between the city and Chon Thanh. This cut off surface transportation into An Loc from the south. For many months thereafter the provincial capital was dependent upon aerial resupply.¹⁴

TASK FORCE 52

(C) Task Force 52 was composed of two battalions from the 18th ARVN Division which normally operated in Long Khanh Province in eastern Military Region 3. This organization had been under the operational control of the 5th ARVN Division since 21 March. Formed around the 2d Battalion, 52d Regiment, and the 1st Battalion, 48th Regiment, this force had as attachments the 52d Regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Company, C Battery, 182d Artillery (105mm howitzer), a platoon of 155mm howitzers, and B Company, 18th Engineer Battalion.

(C) On 28 March the task force moved north along Route 13 and began to operate in an area on both sides of Route 17, a little over a kilometer

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west of Route 13 and some 18 kilometers north of An Loc where the 160mm howitzer platoon remained. Upon moving into the area, the task force commander, LTC Trinh, had directed that the organization occupy two abandoned fire support bases astride Route 17 in the center of his area of responsibility. The infantry battalions alternated in securing the bases and conducting operations from them. The reconnaissance company conducted local security operations along Route 17. In performing these missions, the task force was part of the border screen for the 8th ARVN Division. The other main element in this screen was the force at Loc Ninh.

(C) During the first three days of April, the task force had only light contacts. On the morning of the fourth of April, the 2d Battalion, 52d Regiment, began the routine mission of clearing Route 17 from the two fire bases which it secured. As the battalion reached the intersection of Routes 17 and 13, it became engaged in a fierce contact. Some of the advisors began to suspect that the task force might be cut off from the remainder of the 8th ARVN Division forces at An Loc.

(C) Activity increased on the following day, 5 April, while the battle of Loc Ninh was unfolding to the north. There were several disturbing indications of growing enemy presence. Whenever an ARVN force attempted to move outside the fire support bases, they came under indirect fire from 82mm mortars and 122mm rockets. As the day passed, these began to fall upon the bases themselves. To the west the 1st Battalion, 48th Regiment, had ambushed an enemy force, killing fifteen and capturing five pounds of documents. Later that day, the task force received an intelligence report that an enemy regiment was within seven kilometers of the twin fire bases. In response to this warning, the task force commander moved the 1st Battalion, 48th Regiment, four kilometers closer to the bases. This put them within range of the task force 81mm mortars in addition to the fires of the composite artillery element.

(C) The next day, 6 April, 8th ARVN Division headquarters directed Task Force 82 to reinforce Loc Ninh with one battalion. The 2d Battalion, 52d Regiment, was chosen for this mission and began to move along Route 17. The battalion made contact with a stubborn enemy force in the vicinity of the junction of Routes 13 and 17, the same area where it had had a sharp engagement two days earlier. In an attempt to dislodge the enemy the battalion called for indirect fires. Some six hundred rounds were fired to no avail; the enemy held his position. Since the available tactical air support was committed to the defense of Loc Ninh, the battalion returned to its fire base. Throughout the

day the twin fire bases came under heavy enemy indirect fire, including 160mm howitzer shelling. Although casualties had been light until 6 April, the resupply situation was becoming critical. There had been no surface resupply for four days, and now airdrop was the only method open. To insure a water supply, the 52d Reconnaissance Company secured a portion of the small stream to the west of the fire base.

(C) During the morning of 7 April, the task force was subjected to intense shelling. Enemy ground probes from the west, southwest, and north followed. The mortar and howitzer ammunition remaining at the base rapidly approached depletion as a result of the heavy counterbattery fires. In the midst of the shelling, the 8th ARVN Division ordered the task force to move to An Loc by road. The lead elements of the convoy were stopped short of Route 13 by the same enemy force that had blocked the 2d Battalion, 52d Regiment, earlier in the week. The American advisors observed that one reason for the effectiveness of the enemy effort was that the task force did not have enough infantry out in front of them to push through the road block. The difficulty was that the convoy had departed from the fire support base with the artillery and trucks leading. In addition, the advisors on the ground were unable to obtain tactical air support, even with the help of MG Hollingsworth. The remnants of the convoy returned to the fire base area after suffering heavy casualties. Three of the 105mm howitzers in the lead element were captured. The entire action, from departure to return, had taken just over one hour.

(C) Task Force 82 was ordered to destroy all its equipment and move on foot. The battered organization was unable to destroy its three remaining 105mm howitzers, and these were destroyed twenty minutes later by tactical air strikes on order of MG Hollingsworth. As the task force moved eastward along Route 17 toward the junction with Route 13 with the 2d Battalion, 52d Regiment, leading, it was ambushed in the same area where the three previous heavy contacts had occurred. This time, however, the column was hit almost immediately from three directions. One ambush was sprung at the original site, another several hundred meters farther south along Route 13 where the advance elements had reached, and the third back at the fire support base where elements of the 1st Battalion, 48th Regiment, remained.¹⁰

(C) After bitter fighting the ambush was broken sufficiently to permit the column to continue. The order was passed to move south through the jungle toward An Loc. The three American advisors, wounded during the fighting, remained at the ambush site along Route 13 with fifteen wounded

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South Vietnamese soldiers. Above them in his command and control helicopter was BG John R. McGiffert, Deputy Commanding General, TRAC. LTC Walter D. Gluger, the wounded senior advisor, asked BG McGiffert for permission to bring LTC Thinh, his ARVN counterpart, along with him if he were extracted by medical evacuation helicopter. When McGiffert learned that the ARVN task force commander was not wounded, he refused permission. This was a sound decision, for Thinh was able to reach An Loc safely with most of his command which, though scattered and disorganized, contributed to the strengthening of the defense.

(U) BG McGiffert remained above the wounded for the rest of the day, overseeing the attempts to evacuate them. The first two helicopters to make the try were damaged by fire and aborted the mission. The third aircraft was also hit, and its pilot was killed. McGiffert returned to his headquarters at nightfall and planned a major operation for the next day to extract the advisors and as many of the wounded Vietnamese soldiers as possible. During the night an Air Force AC-130 Spectre gunship remained on station over them.

(U) At about 0600 hours the next morning, 8 April, the group of wounded Americans and ARVN soldiers saw a group of about 25 uniformed enemy soldiers toward their hiding place. The ARVN soldiers took them under fire while helicopter gunships attacked and killed them from above. Several hours later, the operation planned during the night began. Waves of tactical fighters struck the area around the wounded soldiers. At about 1100 hours three light observation helicopters skimmed toward the area at tree top level and landed on Route 13 to the front of the advisors, despite the fact that they were receiving enemy fire. The three Americans and nine of the surviving South Vietnamese scrambled aboard. As they flew out to the south, the ships were hit by automatic weapons fire, wounding again one of the rescued advisors. The aircraft reached safety shortly afterward, and the wounded were taken to medical facilities.¹⁵

(C) Meanwhile, the situation became critical at Quan Loi airfield, where the helicopter refueling and rearming area was defended by two rifle companies of the 7th Regiment. Within their perimeter was a section of two 106mm howitzers. On 7 April at 1925 hours this force was subjected to heavy enemy ground attack, with the assaulting forces using gas. During the fighting, the enemy placed B-40 gunners in the upper floors of the French homes at the rubber plantation. Although the ARVN situation was untenable. That night they were ordered to destroy their equipment and escape and evade to the An Loc perimeter. After a day and

a half of infiltration toward friendly lines, these units reached An Loc on 9 April. The fall of Quan Loi was significant because it left the enemy in possession of dominating high ground to the north-east of An Loc. From this position, they were able to shell the city freely.¹⁷

THE FIRST ATTACKS

(U) The days of 8 to 12 April were relatively quiet. Combat activity varied from light to moderate, as both friendly and enemy forces prepared for the battle at An Loc. The forces at An Loc continued to strengthen their positions. The entire 21st ARVN Division had arrived in Lai Khe by 11 April, and the airborne brigade was moving north of Chon Thanh toward contact with the 7th NVA Division which had established the road block south of An Loc. As intelligence efforts and captured prisoners indicated an increasingly heavy buildup of enemy forces in the An Loc area, B-52 and tactical air strikes were placed on the suspected locations. Observation aircraft noted enemy troop and vehicle movement, which was also attacked by friendly aircraft, despite intense enemy antiaircraft fires.

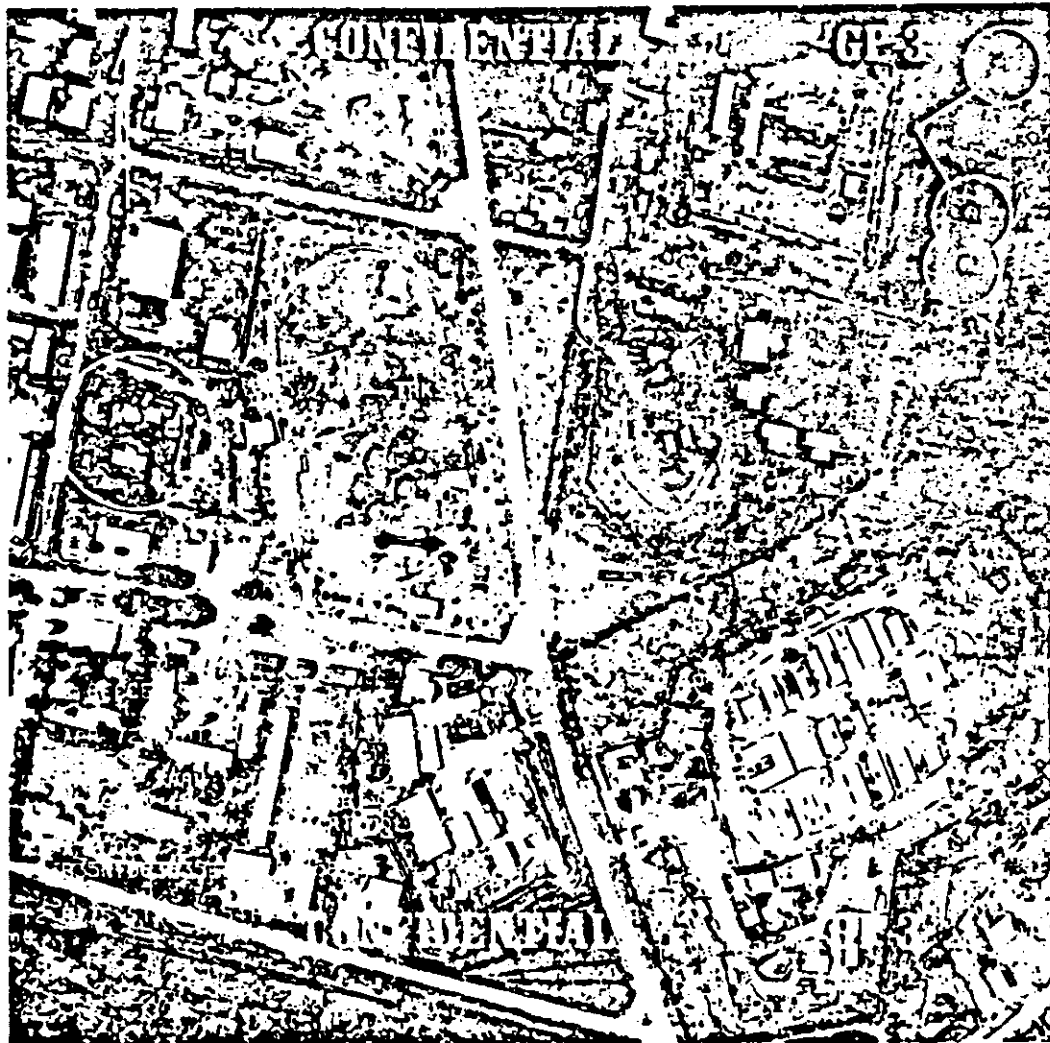
(U) Reinforcements were airlifted into An Loc during the last two days of this period. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 8th ARVN Regiment, and the regimental reconnaissance company were flown to the city by helicopters of the 1st Brigade, 1st US Air Cavalry Division. These additional troops closed within the perimeter on 11 and 12 April. The American brigade also provided CH-47 helicopters to transport supplies and evacuate wounded and civilians. With Cobra gunships, they flew reconnaissance and troop support missions around the city.

(U) Contact with the enemy continued to increase in the An Loc area during the five days before the first major battle. Friendly units patrolling outward from the An Loc perimeter encountered stiffening resistance from enemy forces toward the northeast and southwest of the city. Reports from ARVN and civilian observers indicated that the enemy was driving cattle and civilian refugees ahead of his advance to activate the mines and automatic ambushes placed by the defenders of An Loc. Civilians also reported that there were numerous tanks in the area. Enemy artillery attacks began.

(U) ARVN soldiers who had escaped capture in the fall of Loc Ninh continued to straggle in. At one time on 11 April, 50 men of the 2d Battalion, 9th Regiment, arrived. At another time, the district chief of Loc Ninh returned, and later his senior advisor, MAJ Davidson, reached the An Loc perimeter safely. Civilian refugees from Loc Ninh and

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Southwestern edge of An Loc on 10 April 1972 before the first attack.

the villages in the An Loc area continued to seek the safety of the friendly defenses.¹⁸

(C) MG Hollingsworth had been over the An Loc area every day. On 10 April he had observed the bodies of approximately 200 enemy soldiers who had been killed by air strikes. Also he noticed the increase in ground probes beginning on the ninth and increasing in intensity during the follow-

ing days. Enemy artillery bombardment became heavy on 12 April, and it was evident to him that the enemy would try their first major attack on the morning of the thirteenth. He radioed BG McGiffert, who was also in the air overseeing operations, to meet him at the 5th ARVN Division base camp at Lai Khe. Upon arrival, they went into conference among the rubber trees in the area.

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from the enemy. The aircraft hit tanks, destroyed supply vehicles, and slowed ground assaults. There were 369 enemy verified as killed on the 13th of April: 200 of these were killed by air strikes. One enemy attack from the northwest was passing through the preplanned target area of the big bombers when the strike occurred. Three or four tanks were destroyed and an estimated 100 attacking soldiers were killed. MG Hollingsworth told GEN Abrams the air support had been decisive. "The massive air support of all types," he reported, "tipped the scales in our favor yesterday."²³

(U) BG McGiffert was particularly impressed with the effectiveness of the B-52 strikes. He noted that the target boxes he and MG Hollingsworth had planned at Lai Khe late in the afternoon of the twelfth were very close to the defenders. "I really believe that without those the city would have fallen," he said later, "because I think the infantry would have gotten in with the tanks."²⁴

(C) The attacking enemy forces, by now identified as the 271st and 272d Regiments of the 9th VC Division, shifted their forces during the fourteenth. To pin ARVN forces in place and permit regrouping for future assaults, the enemy hit An Loc with heavy rocket and mortar attacks beginning at 0550 hours on the morning of 14 April and continuing throughout the day. Shortly after the attacks began, the 36th ARVN Ranger Battalion detected heavy movement to the east of An Loc near the road between the besieged province capital and Quan Lo. COL William Miller, Senior Advisor to the 5th ARVN Division, reported that vehicles were moving four kilometers to the north of An Loc at 0630 hours. In addition, tanks were observed to the east, but there was no significant ground attack made against the perimeter during the day. In reaction to the events of the preceding two days, however, four B-52 strikes were directed against known or suspected enemy positions.²⁵

(C) The situation remained stabilized on the evening of the thirteenth. At 0435 hours the next morning, however, the enemy renewed his attacks. He prefaced a ground assault with attacks-by-fire from 155mm howitzers and 122mm rockets. Shortly after the indirect fires began to fall upon the defenders, enemy infantry were reported in the defensive barbed wire on the southern and southeastern sides of the ARVN perimeter. The South Vietnamese defenders also reported that armored vehicles were once again within the city, but by 0745 hours the initial pressure against the defenses had momentarily slackened. Several hours later, however, An Loc was again under heavy pressure from the enemy, with North Vietnamese armor reported to be within 500 meters of the 5th ARVN Division command post. The situation was later

restored by driving off the ground attack and neutralizing or destroying the armor.²⁶

(U) The ARVN III Corps and the American Third Regional Assistance Command had been active meanwhile in rushing reinforcements to the battle area. While the 21st ARVN Division continued to push north along Route 13 from Chon Thanh, the 1st Airborne Brigade was ordered to positions on the group of hills to the southeast of An Loc. On 13 April five companies of the brigade were carried in by American helicopters and conducted an air assault southeast of Hill 169. The following day, the remainder of the brigade was also airlifted by American helicopters into a nearby position. This placed three airborne battalions just to the southeast of the An Loc perimeter.²⁷

(C) Enemy pressure against the besieged province capital increased on the fifteenth. "There was a great battle at An Loc yesterday," MG Hollingsworth reported to GEN Abrams on the morning after, "perhaps the greatest of this campaign." Enemy indirect fires were heavy throughout the day. Particularly troublesome to the sorely pressed defenders was the accurate tank and 75mm recoilless rifle fire. One tank was able to advance within 200 meters of the 5th ARVN Division command post and fire directly into it and the division's tactical operations center. Three division staff officers, including the division G3, were killed. The recoilless rifles concentrated on the tactical operations center of the provincial forces.

(C) Once more, faulty employment of enemy armor assisted the South Vietnamese soldiers on the ground. Early in the morning, eleven tanks joined in the attack on An Loc but were destroyed or neutralized by ARVN tank killer teams and tactical air support. Later, about 1400 hours, the enemy sent ten more tanks against the An Loc defenses from the north and west supported by heavy mortar, rocket, and artillery fires. Again the ground tank killer teams and tactical air engaged the attacking tanks and destroyed nine of them. Although the defenders knew that there were more tanks, they no longer stood in fear of them. All available tactical air was over An Loc during the day; the massive air effort continued through the night. By late afternoon the antiaircraft fires began to subside as tactical aircraft located and destroyed some of their positions.

(C) "I am most pleased with the outcome of the battle yesterday," MG Hollingsworth noted on the morning of the sixteenth. "The enemy hit us hard all day long with everything he could muster — and we threw it right back at him. The forces in An Loc realized that they had to fight and they fought well." He further reported to GEN Abrams that although enemy indirect fires were still falling

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on the city, the garrison was able to cope with it.²⁵

(U) When the dust of battle cleared on the morning of 16 April, the major attacks of the first phase had ended, although this was unknown to the defenders. The South Vietnamese had yielded the northern half of the province capital in the face of the ground, armor, and artillery attacks. The next line of defense was quickly adjusted in preparation for the expected future attacks. The most significant result of the fighting from 13 to 16 April was that the ARVN forces had held. This thwarted the enemy objectives to take An Loc, establish a command headquarters and provisional government, and then move against Saigon. The enemy had lost 23 armored vehicles, most of which were T-54 tanks. However, the ammunition dump and the northern half of the city were lost and An Loc lay under heavy siege.²⁶

(C) When the fighting had begun at An Loc, two tasks faced LTC Minh, the III Corps Commander. The first was to prevent enemy forces from advancing south to Saigon. The second was to lift the siege at An Loc by having a relief column move from the south up Route 13. To accomplish the first objective, the 1st Airborne Brigade had initially been positioned at Chon Thanh, followed shortly by the 21st ARVN Division brought in from the Delta. For several weeks after the arrival of the 21st ARVN Division in the III Corps area, it was assigned the mission of stopping the enemy drive in the Route 13 area of Binh Long and Binh Duong Provinces. This remained the division mission until after the first major enemy attacks upon the An Loc garrison had ended. Once the situation had stabilized, the senior ARVN commanders realized that there would not be an enemy drive on Saigon until An Loc had been taken, and the Division was ordered to push north, clearing the highway from Chon Thanh to An Loc and thereby raise the siege. For the remainder of the campaign, ARVN forces were occupied along Route 13 to the south of An Loc in an attempt to eliminate the blocking force. They were not successful; the 7th NVA Division proved to be a dogged and skillful defender. Moreover, the enemy was more familiar with the area than was the 21st ARVN Division from the Delta. The 7th NVA Division had operated in the Binh Long area over a period of several years. The 165th Regiment of the Division had interdicted Route 13 during the enemy Tet Offensive of 1968.²⁷

(U) On 17 April COL Miller, the American senior advisor to the 5th ARVN Division, reported to MG Hollingsworth that the 5th ARVN Division was unable to retake the lost northern half of the city. During the night of the sixteenth, the invading enemy had reinforced its defenses in northern

An Loc and was firmly entrenched with mortars and anti-aircraft weapons in support. Miller suspected that the enemy would grow stronger in those positions and warned Hollingsworth that the city was ringed on three sides with heavy concentrations of anti-aircraft weapons. He alerted the general to his belief that "the enemy will use strangulation and starvation tactics and then attack in force," and noted that the enemy appeared to have no ammunition resupply problem for his artillery and mortars. His assessment of the capabilities of the badly mauled 5th ARVN Division was blunt and unencouraging. "The division is tired and worn out; supplies minimal, casualties continue to mount, medical supplies coverage low," he reported. "Wounded a major problem, mass burials for military and civilian, morale at a low ebb. In spite of incurring heavy losses from US air strikes, the enemy continues to persist."²⁸

(U) Intelligence reports indicated that there were at least five enemy regiments in the An Loc area. Friendly casualties mounted under the continuing enemy indirect fire, and resupply began to be a problem, for only token recoveries were made from airdrops. Friendly artillery had been all but destroyed and counterbattery efforts could be made only through the use of tactical air strikes. Evacuation of wounded troops was next to impossible because South Vietnamese Air Force helicopters refused to touch down; in fact, they often sustained heavy losses when they approached An Loc.²⁹

(C) To force the ARVN troops into a smaller perimeter, the 9th VC Division was reinforced by two other regiments. The remaining tanks were assigned to accompany the 275th Regiment from the 5th VC Division and the 141st Regiment from the 7th NVA Division. These two regiments were ordered to attack the 8th Airborne Battalion and its 105mm howitzer battery of six artillery pieces on Windy Hill three and one-half kilometers to the east of the An Loc perimeter. The three regiments of the 9th VC Division, the 271st, 272d, and 95C, would attack the town itself. In anticipation of the success of this move, Radio Hanoi announced on 18 April that An Loc had been taken and that the headquarters for the Communist government of South Vietnam would be established there on the twentieth. In confirmation of these enemy plans, a significant intelligence find was made also on the eighteenth, about three kilometers northeast of Tonle Cham, where the 92d Ranger Border Defense Battalion was stationed. A company from this battalion was patrolling the road from Tonle Cham toward An Loc when they killed an individual who was identified and confirmed as a highly placed political officer from the enemy Central Office for

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South Vietnam (COSVN). He had been carrying a six page handwritten letter from the political commissar of the 9th VC Division to COSVN Headquarters. This letter divulged plans for another assault on An Loc that was to begin on 19 April. In addition the letter explained to COSVN the serious problems encountered during the initial attack on the provincial capital when the 9th VC Division failed to take its objective. The political commissar reported that the tactical air and B-52 strikes had been unbelievably devastating. He also noted that the 9th VC Division had had problems with the tanks. In some instances the tanks had left the infantry, while in others the infantry would not go with the tanks. The commissar noted that word had reached the tank crews that An Loc had already been taken by the 9th VC Division so that all they had to do was drive into the town, and finally, he was critical of the 9th VC Division commander.

(C) To meet his 20 April deadline the enemy attacked in the early morning hours of the nineteenth. The attack opened with heavy bombardment by rockets and artillery on An Loc and on the ARVN units at Windy Hill and Hill 169. The enemy proceeded initially according to plan. Six tanks assaulted with the 141st and 273rd Regiments in the attack upon the 6th Airborne Battalion's fire support base on Windy Hill. The airborne brigade headquarters and its protecting ranger company on Hill 139 were overwhelmed. During the battle, tactical air and B-52 strikes inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking enemy forces and knocked out the accompanying tanks, but the ARVN units were forced to abandon their position with heavy casualties, leaving the destroyed artillery battery behind. Two companies of the 6th Airborne Battalion, the airborne brigade headquarters, and the ranger company succeeded in reaching the An Loc perimeter. The remaining two companies of the airborne battalion were cut off from An Loc and forced to move south, where they were later picked up by VNAF helicopters. The enemy now held the high ground above An Loc.

(C) In the meantime, the elite 9th VC Division was making no progress in its attack on An Loc. Heavy losses in personnel and equipment prevented any further progress by the three assaulting enemy regiments. An enemy plan to disengage, move southwest to Route 13, and attack An Loc from the south never materialized. On 21 April the 5th and 8th Airborne Battalions had lost on An Loc and occupied positions among the rubber trees just south of the town. The presence of this relatively fresh and elite fighting force in the southern perimeter was critical in preventing the enemy's execution of this plan. Steady enemy ground pressure and con-

tinuous rocket and artillery fire into An Loc continued through 22 April. After the twenty-second ground pressure lessened and the shelling phase of the battle began in earnest. Antiaircraft fires continued to remain intense. These made helicopter operations into An Loc almost nonexistent except for necessary American advisory resupply and medical evacuation of American personnel.

(U) When the attack ended on the twenty-second of April, COL Miller reported to MG Hollingsworth that the enemy had increased his indirect fires "almost to the point of bombardment." There was no change in the situation in the northern part of the city. The northeastern corner, remained heavily fortified and strongly defended by the enemy, and the ARVN troops were unable to breach these positions. The 81st Ranger Group was able to move in the northwestern corner and to score gains against the enemy by using the AC-119 Spectre aircraft equipped with the 105mm howitzer. The enemy held the dominant terrain around An Loc as a result of having driven the 6th Airborne Battalion and the airborne brigade headquarters from Windy Hill and Hill 169. Antiaircraft fire continued around the city. "Enemy enjoys observing no resupply; enemy enjoys lack of helicopters landing at this location," the senior advisor continued. "Come hell or high water, both should be accomplished."

(U) Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy forces surrounding the city were dispersing into dispositions that sought to overcome or reduce the effects of B-52 strikes. South Vietnamese units conducting short patrols after 22 April confirmed that enemy troops were being killed by air strikes. The tactical situation remained essentially unchanged until 10 May. Neither side made significant gains or sustained sufficient losses to necessitate yielding. South Vietnamese helicopters flew some successful troop replacement missions into the airborne positions south of the city, but they continued to sustain heavy losses in men and equipment. The South Vietnamese defenders were able to evacuate some of their wounded, but only the most able-bodied were able to board the VNAF helicopters which, in most cases, refused to do more than hover momentarily. By consistently probing on the west side of the perimeter, the enemy managed to occupy a small portion of a city block near the intersection of Route 246 with the perimeter road. By persistent efforts the enemy eventually secured the full block.

(U) Enemy indirect fires continued to strike the city at the rate of about 1,000 rounds a day. All available calibers of mortars, rockets, and artillery, in addition to 100mm tank gunfire, were employed. On three occasions, CS or tear gas projectiles were

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fired in the vicinity of the 5th ARVN Division command post. The projectiles were armed by quick, delay, and time fuses. Late in the shelling period on 8 May the senior advisor to the 5th Division noted that the amount of artillery fired appeared to be lessening while the mortar fires were increasing. Both fired freely during aerial resupply drops. He noted that the mortars seemed to fire on ARVN troops positions and concentrations while the artillery was directed against the division command post. With the continued shelling and the lack of aerial resupply, the conditions in An Loc deteriorated rapidly.¹⁴

RESUPPLY BY AIR

(U) From 7 April to 25 June An Loc was resupplied entirely by air. The enemy had completely cut all roads leading into the area and no other lines of communication were available to the defenders and their support organizations. During the first week of the fighting around the city, US Air Force resources had not been used nor considered necessary. Only gradually did ground commanders realize that the danger from enemy ground fire was prohibitively costly to slow-moving helicopters and C-123 aircraft. From 7 to 19 April aerial resupply was primarily a US Army and Vietnamese Air Force operation; American and Vietnamese helicopters and Vietnamese C-123s flew 93 sorties, delivering 301 tons of supplies. The helicopter effort was terminated after 12 April when three American CH-47s sustained minor damage from antiaircraft fire and one Vietnamese CH-47 was destroyed. The Vietnamese Air Force continued for another week with C-123 sorties using the low level paradrop method. This worked well for 39 sorties, but on the 40th, the aircraft was hit by ground fire and crashed three kilometers southwest of An Loc. Further low level resupply by C-123s was cancelled immediately. From this time on, the defenders of the city were entirely dependent upon US Air Force C-130s for aerial resupply.¹⁵

(C) During the last five days of the Vietnamese C-123 effort, while the first major attack was raging, American and Vietnamese commanders realized that additional help was needed. Accordingly, on 15 April MACV requested that the US Air Force begin dropping supplies into An Loc. Five missions were planned for 16 to 18 April using the low altitude container delivery system in daylight drops with C-130 aircraft. The loads contained ammunition, rations, and medical supplies. Aiming for a 250 meter square over a soccer field in the southern portion of the town, the missions were successful in delivering the supplies. The first four aircraft, however, suffered moderate to severe damage from enemy ground fire, and the fifth

crashed after being hit. The Air Force understandably terminated aerial resupply using this method.¹⁶

(C) The high altitude low opening (HALO) method was tried next. In this technique, the supply bundles are dropped in free fall from a relatively safe altitude of 6,000 to 9,000 feet at a release point to which the aircraft is vectored by a ground radar station. The chutes are designed to open and fully deploy 500-800 feet above the drop zone. In the eight missions flown from 19 to 23 April, this system failed primarily because of parachute malfunctions. Advisors to the 5th ARVN Division reported that most of the material fell outside the perimeter and that a considerable portion doubtless fell into enemy hands. Intelligence reports received by the advisors confirmed that the enemy was recovering supplies which missed the drop zone and were within their reach. Although tactical air strikes were called upon to destroy the unrecoverable bundles, this was often impossible because the bundles were hidden by the foliage in the area where they had landed. The malfunctions were traced directly to Vietnamese packers who lacked the technical background and experience necessary for the more complex packing techniques required for the high altitude low opening method. Until these problems could be solved, the Air Force returned to the low altitude container delivery system.¹⁷

(C) For four days, 23 to 26 April, the Air Force flew missions using this system in daylight. Even though different air routes were used, the enemy was able to plot the course of the aircraft from reports sent by numerous observers scattered throughout the plantation area surrounding An Loc. The enemy placed his antiaircraft weaponry on every possible air approach to the city where he could easily bring the C-130s under fire. The use of tactical aircraft in suppression roles did not ease the situation beyond a brief reduction in the volume of fire. The C-130s were particularly vulnerable over the drop zone where they slowed to speeds of about 130 knots; every aircraft making an aerial delivery received battle damage. Although the Air Force succeeded in getting the supplies to the defenders on the ground with a good recovery rate, this system was again cancelled on 26 April when an aircraft was hit by enemy ground fire, exploded, and crashed. Low level deliveries at night became the order of business until the high altitude delivery problems could be solved.¹⁸

(C) The night resupply missions were not as dangerous for the air crews, but the delivery rate to the Vietnamese forces and their American advisors in An Loc declined. The basic problem was the difficulty in identifying the drop zones at night; the small area within the defensive perimeter made

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the drop zones smaller than those recommended in standard USAF guidelines, so even a near miss often resulted in loss of the supplies to the enemy. These problems were magnified at night because even using drop zone marker lights, pilots found it hard to distinguish the markers from the many fires and lights of An Loc. An attempt at establishing a spotter system on the ground to recover lost bundles failed because the forward air controllers were reluctant to give advance warning of the resupply runs, even by using codewords. As a result, warnings came either too early so that spotters tired of their watch, or came at the last minute, allowing no time for them to reach their positions. Use of the AC-130 spotlight to illuminate the drop zone was tried, but was discontinued because of the danger to the gunships from enemy fire. Neither did attaching lights to the dropped bundles help. High intensity flashing lights were mistaken for small arms fire, and constant beam flashlights could not be seen because of their low intensity. After a third C-130 crashed on the night of 3 May, COL Miller recommended to MG Hollingsworth that all low altitude aerial resupply attempts be discontinued until a workable method could be developed. On 4 May, all planned resupply drops were cancelled.²²

(C) In the meantime, the US Army and Air Force had been working together to solve the problems related to high altitude drops. Seventy-six packers arrived from the Army's 549th Quartermaster Aerial Resupply Company on Okinawa, and together with Air Force quality control personnel they worked on troubleshooting procedures to isolate the causes of parachute malfunctions. These two teams produced immediate improvement in the delivery of resupply by air drop.

(U) Two methods of high altitude drop were used successfully beginning on 4 May. The first was the initially abortive HALO system; the other was the high velocity drop. Experimentation while dropping supplies into An Loc determined what items were best used with each method. HALO was improved to the point where 91 percent of all bundles dropped landed in the drop zone. High altitude high velocity drops proved to be even more accurate, with 98 percent of the bundles hitting the drop zone.²³

(U) Advisors on the ground in An Loc agreed that aerial resupply was sufficient, although there were some problems. "I never went hungry," said CPT Moffett, the Deputy Senior Advisor to the 3d Ranger Group. "I always had plenty of rice and tons and there were always plenty of bullets lying around, and I don't think the resupply problem, strictly an opinion, was nearly as bad as they made it to be because they liked to exaggerate

quite a bit." COL Walter F. Ulmer, Jr., the Senior Advisor to the 5th ARVN Division, agreed. "Although there were some extended periods when certain items were in short supply," he reported after the battle had been won, "logistical support for the battle of An Loc was satisfactory."²⁴

(U) Once the aerial delivery problem had been solved, distribution of the supplies on the ground remained the major difficulty. "It was almost a murder scene," BG McGiffert reported later. "The guys who got there first got the goods." Not until late in the battle did an effective organization for distribution of supplies exist. There were reports of firefights between groups of ARVN soldiers over dropped food supplies; even the American advisors were threatened. The dog-eat-dog attitude persisted until late May when sufficient supplies were arriving. The problem was finally solved when BG Hung placed the commander of the airborne brigade in charge of recovery and distribution of the airdrops. Hung also sent the Division G4 and an ARVN colonel to the drop zone to keep lists of what had been recovered and who had received it. Instead of soldiers or units feeding for themselves, teams were sent to the recovery area where airborne soldiers issued the supplies in rationed amounts.

(U) Until 24 May the artillery fires of the encircling enemy forces complicated the recovery and distribution problem. As soon as a supply drop was made, enemy indirect fires began to hit the drop zone; consequently there were no volunteers to go to the area and supervise the distribution process. Later, enemy fire diminished to the point where effective recovery could be made.²⁵

(U) In addition to disrupting the recovery and distribution of supplies, incoming fire prevented the use of Vietnamese Air Force helicopters for medical support. This severely affected the morale of the soldiers in the An Loc perimeter, for they knew that if they were severely wounded, evacuation to proper medical care was unlikely, and medical supplies at An Loc were critically low. The deteriorating medical situation was obvious to all; the hospital facilities had been destroyed in the first days of the battle, and until early June aerial resupply efforts were not successful in getting needed medical supplies to the besieged forces. Many of the wounded died from lack of proper attention, and the authorities on the scene were forced to resort to mass burials in relatively shallow graves.²⁶

(U) The difficulty in helicopter support was attributed to both a lack of leadership and faulty organization. American advisors agreed that it was difficult to get the Vietnamese helicopter pilots to fly near An Loc. Not only were they wary of the

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dangers of ground fire as they flew toward and into the perimeter, but they were concerned about the immediate enemy artillery fire that followed their landings. Strong and imaginative leadership was needed to prevent the VNAP pilots from following the same flight paths into and out of An Loc. The VNAP air mission commander was rarely with the group of ships flying into the firing pattern of the antiaircraft and artillery fire. As a result, inexperienced officers were in charge of the critical lead ship. These were the people who made the decision whether to abort the mission as the aircraft came under fire. Usually the decision was made to abort, and the air mission commander could do nothing about it. When an aggressive pilot was in the lead ship, the aircraft came through despite the firing. But that was not the only problem. American advisors reported that on two oc-

casions, only the first one or two helicopters landed; the rest hovered out of reach of the wounded who needed to get aboard.

(U) There was a measure of logic in remaining above those attempting to reach safety aboard the aircraft. On many occasions helicopters within reach of the soldiers were nearly swamped and overturned with the rush to climb aboard. This lack of control on the ground was an army problem; it paralleled the lack of control and organization on the aerial resupply drop zone in the An Loc perimeter. The combined circumstances in the air and on the ground compounded the difficulties.

(U) In late May, after American helicopters successfully resupplied the American advisors in An Loc, LTC Minh, the Corps Commander, asked MG Hollingsworth and BG McGiffert to permit American helicopters to lead the Vietnamese aircraft into



See. Vietnamese soldiers on the perimeter of An Loc. The enemy threat, erratic resupply, and lack of medical evacuation served to lower ARVN morale.

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the city to show them how it was done. At first, Hollingworth was adamant in his refusal, but he finally agreed to one operation if the VNAF helicopter unit would meet certain strict conditions. Americans would be in command of the entire effort from start to finish. A VNAF colonel would have to fly with the American mission commander to help control the Vietnamese pilots, and he would be required to participate in the reconnaissance flight. The pilots themselves were required to agree in advance that they would obey the orders given by the American mission commander, and discipline themselves against breaking formation or aborting during the mission. Finally, Minh was required to talk personally to BG Hung over the radio and insure that the 8th Division Commander would have a senior ARVN officer on the landing zone to control the wounded South Vietnamese soldiers. Minh agreed to all of these conditions.

(U) The operation took place on 3 May. COL John Richardson, commander of the American 12th Combat Aviation Group, planned the movement and was in charge of the execution of the operation. He piloted the lead ship, with four VNAF helicopters to follow him in. Moving into the city at treetop level, the aircraft encountered insignificant small arms fire. At the landing zone, however, not all went as had been planned and as LTC Minh had promised. The trail helicopter came down low enough only to kick off supplies and then hovered out of reach of the soldiers on the ground. The lead American ship was able to take on a full load of stretcher cases, but only because the strong-arm tactics of the door gunners held the walking wounded at bay. The other VNAF helicopters were overwhelmed by walking wounded and almost swamped; in the end these craft did not take out any of the more seriously wounded. Although the operation was not wholly successful, the helicopters had landed in An Loc and shown it could be done. For the next several weeks, the Vietnamese Air Force succeeded in getting three or four ships a day into and out of An Loc.⁴²

(U) Part of the problem throughout had been that the helicopters belonged to the Vietnamese Air Force, while their primary user was the Vietnamese Army. There was no single commander jointly responsible for both the helicopter pilots and the ground troops below the level of the Chief of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff. Earlier in the war the decision had been made that helicopters would be given to the Air Force, but at An Loc this system was wholly unsuccessful. Senior American officers thought that the best system was that adopted by the US Army. If the Vietnamese Army commanders were given direct control over the helicopter units, these units in turn would become more responsive to the needs of the troops on the ground.

At An Loc the system was too complicated. The defenders of An Loc were faced with a situation where an ARVN lieutenant general had no control over a VNAF colonel. Although the VNAF colonel was quite cooperative most of the time, the general could not obtain the flexibility and response that he needed to sustain his operation successfully. He had been forced to beg for American leadership to step in where the VNAF commanders would not.⁴³

RELATIONS WITH CIVILIANS

(U) A major factor complicating the defense of An Loc during the long weeks of the siege was the presence of large numbers of civilians. The normal city population had been swollen with refugees fleeing from Loc Ninh and the villages surrounding An Loc during the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong advance.

(FOUO) When it became apparent that the fighting would spread to An Loc, many of the inhabitants wanted to flee the town. The Province Chief refused to permit them to leave as they pleased, and his actions disgruntled much of the local citizenry. They later changed their opinion of this policy, however, when others were killed or captured by the enemy while trying to leave An Loc. Refugees reported hundreds of executions in Loc Ninh and reinforced this change of attitude. For the most part the government troops received the cooperation of the townspeople. Most of the civilians did not panic and did not complain about their hardships and losses. Significantly, those who did leave the area went south toward areas held by the South Vietnamese. The people feared that the North Vietnamese would kill them or expose them to danger in involuntary support roles if they were captured. These fears were supported by the harsh experiences of those who attempted to flee to the south but were stopped by the enemy. As a result the people of the town voluntarily supported the government soldiers and were grateful to them for defending what remained of An Loc.

(FOUO) In the early days of the fighting around An Loc the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had encouraged civilians to leave the An Loc area; but later, realizing that the presence of large numbers of civilians in the An Loc perimeter would create considerable logistical problems for the government forces, they indiscriminately killed anyone who attempted to leave the town. Early in the battle a large group of civilians led by a French Catholic priest and a Buddhist monk tried to escape An Loc to the south. They were able to move several kilometers on their way before they were stopped by the enemy. The able-bodied men and women were kidnapped, as well as the older women who might be useful in support roles, and sent toward Loc

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Ninh. Only the old men and children were left. Subsequent attempts by civilians to break out were also unsuccessful. Every group leaving the perimeter was brought under heavy enemy mortar fire. Observers estimated that between four and five hundred of the several thousand who tried to escape were killed as a result of this treatment. After several such experiences with their liberators, most people from the An Loc area cast their lot with the government forces.⁴⁴

(U) The presence of the civilians in the An Loc perimeter strained the already overburdened aerial resupply system. Until the delivery of supplies by air became effective in late May, the civilians were a drain on food stocks and medical supplies. In many cases, the civilians would compete with soldiers for recovery of food and medical supplies from the drop zone. This was not only because of the lack of such items in the besieged city but also because of the failure to organize an effective system for recovery and distribution of supplies.⁴⁵

(FOUO) Relations between the civilians trapped in An Loc and the government forces defending the city varied from unit to unit. The townspeople had high praise for the performance of the Regional and Popular Forces, the airborne brigade, the ranger battalions, and later, the troops of the 18th Division who replaced the 5th Division at An Loc, although they were considered to be ineffectual militarily. For the officers and men of the 5th Division, however, the townspeople had nothing but scorn. The soldiers of the 5th Division engaged in considerable looting and in some cases even fired into the houses to force the occupants out. Although the officers of the 5th Division did not encourage looting, they apparently lacked sufficient control and discipline to prevent it.

(FOUO) A surprisingly large number of 5th Division soldiers were taking drugs. Observers within the city estimated that perhaps an average

of twenty men in each company were using narcotics. Much of the looting apparently stemmed from the need of the young soldiers to acquire goods to trade for the drugs. The addicts among the troops left their units, did not carry weapons, lived in and around the town, and preyed on the townspeople.

(FOUO) In addition, the troops of the 5th Division were observed selling the airdropped food and medical supplies. On at least one occasion troops of the division fired on ranger and airborne troops who were attempting to retrieve some rations. Much of this trouble arose from a lack of supervision and leadership within the 5th Division. Observers remarked upon the noticeable absence of senior officers actively engaged in directing the perimeter defense. Two government civilian cadre never saw the division commander throughout the siege. The troops of the 5th Division seemed to be commanded solely by company grade officers. The only visible field grade officers were those with the ranger and airborne battalions.⁴⁶

(U) In the ranger sector of the perimeter the relationship between the trapped civilians and the rangers was quite different. There were about 2,000 civilians in that area, with whom they shared their food freely. In return, the people cooked for the rangers and sought out edible vegetation and small animals to add to the meals of both. The inhabitants also took care of the rangers' clothes. If one of the civilians became wounded, the rangers saw that the wound was dressed and bandaged; unit corpemen were used to assist. It was a working relationship of great benefit to both parties. In addition, civilians would occasionally enter that portion of the city held by the enemy; upon their return, they would report to the rangers what had been observed, thus making much useful information available to the friendly forces.⁴⁷

THE SIEGE — PHASE II

THE SECOND ATTACK

(C) On the first of May, the enemy forces began to set the stage for what became a second desperate attempt to capture An Loc. On that day the 5th VC Division moved its headquarters to the vicinity of Hill 169 three kilometers southeast of An Loc. On the following day the E8 and 174th Regiments of the division moved to positions three kilometers east of An Loc in the vicinity of Windy Hill, and north of their division headquarters. The 165th NVA Regiment left its roadblocking positions on Route 13 to the south and moved southwest of the An Loc perimeter. The 141st NVA Regiment moved north to a position within three kilometers

south of the An Loc defensive lines. The 275th VC Regiment remained in place on Windy Hill from which it had driven the airborne artillery battery on 19 April. By 7 May the 5th VC Division with its three regiments was positioned east and south-east of An Loc, the 141st and 165th Regiments of the 7th NVA Division were located south and southwest of the city, and the 272d and 95C Regiments of the 9th VC Division were northeast of the perimeter. These enemy regiments surrounding the city were within two to three thousand meters of the defensive lines.

(C) Facing these seven enemy regiments were less than 4,000 South Vietnamese soldiers inside

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the An Loc perimeter, territorial and regular forces combined. At least a thousand were wounded, although most were able to man their defensive positions in a limited way. Morale was low at this stage of the siege; the 5th Division Commander, the Binh Long Province Chief, and their American advisors were convinced that the defense could not hold against another attack. They stressed to MG Hollingsworth the effects of the continuous artillery bombardment and the failure of the Vietnamese Air Force to evacuate the wounded. Their troops were reluctant to move, shoot, or otherwise expose themselves; they understood that there was no chance for them to be evacuated if they were wounded. "I spent many hours during the course of the next few days encouraging the Province Chief, the Division Commander, and their advisors to hold their positions," Hollingsworth reported. "My attempts to belittle the capability of the enemy and to strengthen friendly forces' morale seemed almost hopeless. Enemy positions and movements, intensity of antiaircraft fire, and the increase in enemy artillery and rockets against An Loc pointed to an imminent all out attack."²⁰

(C) MG Hollingsworth's concern over a renewal of the battle was confirmed when a rallier from the Headquarters, 5th VC Division, turned himself over to regional forces on patrol a short distance from the An Loc perimeter on 5 May. The captive was immediately interrogated by the Binh Long Province Chief, LTC Thinh. The rallier, a Viet Cong lieutenant, told his questioners that the commander of the 9th VC Division had been severely reprimanded by the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) for the division's failure to capture An Loc in mid-April. The commander of the 5th VC Division, whose forces now encircled the city, had told COSVN that he could take An Loc in two days as he had taken Loc Ninh. The rallier understood that the Communist high command had then placed the 5th VC Division in charge of the next assault on the city. The 9th VC Division had been relegated to a supporting role in the attack. The prisoner indicated that a determined enemy effort against An Loc could be expected in the near future.²¹

(C) Strong enemy ground probes and increasing indirect artillery fire beginning at 0530 hours on 9 May alerted MG Hollingsworth to the probable timing of the next major attack. Within two hours the ground pressure subsided, but the heavy bombardment by enemy artillery, mortars, and rockets continued. From his experience with the pattern of enemy attacks in Vietnam, and armed with the knowledge of enemy dispositions and intentions provided by the rallier, Hollingsworth began to plan the defense. He believed that the enemy would

make the major attack on the morning of 11 May, following another day of ground probes against the South Vietnamese defenses. On 9 May the general selected 18 target boxes for B-52 bombers, supplemented by almost 200 tactical air strikes. Hollingsworth flew to Saigon to confer with GEN Abrams. While there he advised Abrams that the An Loc defense would require maximum tactical air support and, as a minimum, the 18 B-52 strikes he had planned. Abrams agreed with Hollingsworth's assessment and promised to send him everything that he requested.

(C) At the same time, GEN Abrams proposed a new plan for the employment of B-52 strikes. His scheme was to give the total strike capability for a 24 hour period to each military region in turn, excepting Military Region 4, which was not included because of the relatively low level of enemy activity there. After three days, strikes would be allocated on the basis of the situation, each region normally receiving eight B-52 strikes each day. MG Hollingsworth was concerned that Military Region 3 would not receive any allocation for two days following the day set aside for him. Because he believed that a major battle was imminent, however, he agreed with the plan under the condition that Military Region 3 have the first day of the full strikes. Abrams approved and wanted to know only when to start. Hollingsworth advised the general that he would provide an answer on the next day.²²

(C) The 5th VC Division commander followed the pattern suspected by MG Hollingsworth. On 10 May the enemy repeated their pattern of strong ground probes before daylight, withdrawing within two hours. Hollingsworth readjusted the 18 target boxes planned the day before and added seven more, based upon his analysis of the ground probes. During the afternoon of 10 May, the TRAC commander advised GEN Abrams that the enemy would begin his main attack and ground assaults on 11 May. He asked that Abrams allocate him one B-52 strike every 55 minutes for the next 25 hours beginning at 0530, 11 May. Abrams agreed.

(C) On the morning of 11 May at 0035 hours the encircling enemy intensified his indirect fire bombardment of the An Loc perimeter, now measuring 1,000 by 1,500 meters. At 0530 hours the ground assault began from all sides. SA-7 missiles were used against Cobra gunships, tactical aircraft, and forward air controllers. During the day, An Loc was hit by 8,300 rounds of indirect fire. In addition to the unprecedented use of the SAM missiles and the longer and more intensive artillery bombardment, the attack differed in other respects from the first major enemy effort in April. The enemy launched coordinated attacks with tanks and infantry, although his handling of these forces remained

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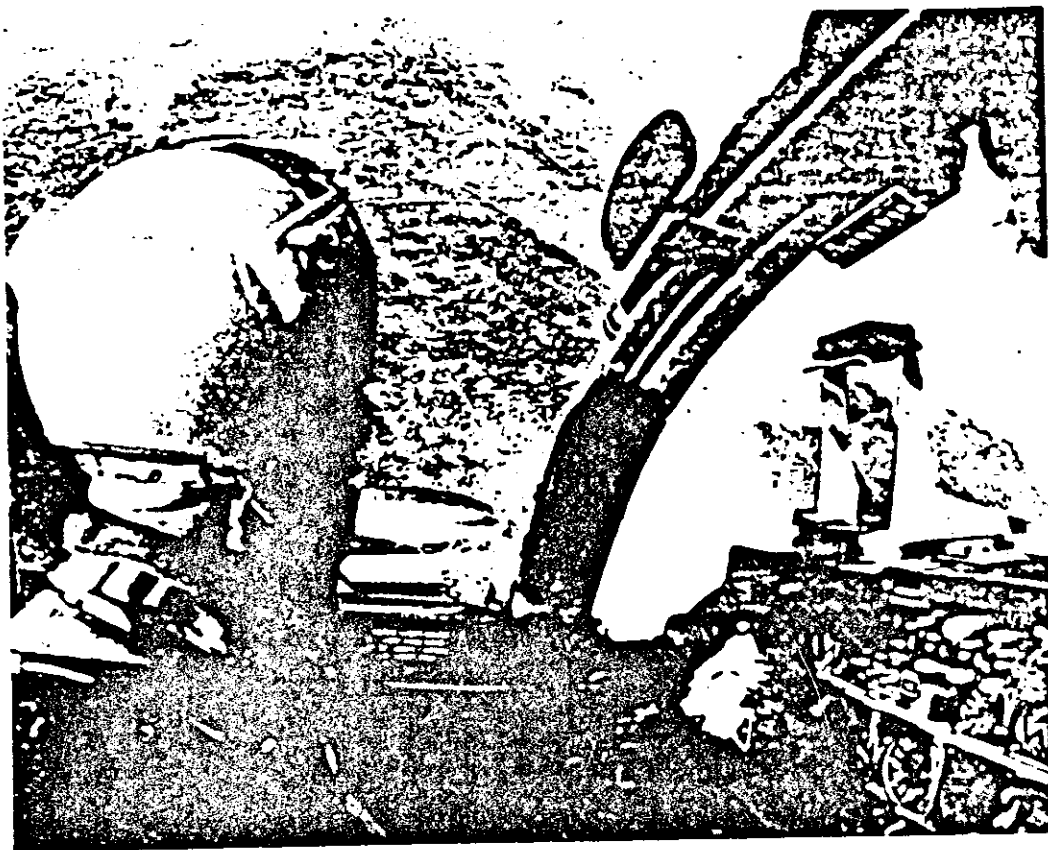
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amateurish. On the friendly side most ARVN soldiers, profiting by their earlier experiences, stood their ground against the enemy armor and destroyed the tanks with the M-72 Light Antitank Weapon.

(U) The enemy main attacks came from the west and northeast. The attacking forces were able to establish two penetrations in these areas (Fig. J-5). Their tactic was to continue to push tanks and infantry into the penetrated defenses in order to expand the salients and link up in the center of the town, thereby splitting the remaining defenders into enclaves that could be defeated in detail. This threat was countered when BG Hung, the 5th ARVN Division Commander, moved the 8th Airborne Battalion from the south of the city. He assigned the battalion the mission of blocking the penetrations in both the west and northeast. This

tactic stopped the enemy in place. The western salient was then methodically attacked by VNAF A-1E Skyraiders and AC-119 Spectre gunships. Because of the narrowness of the northeastern salient, the VNAF fighters were unable to drop their bombs; friendly troops were too close. The Spectre gunships were highly effective, however, and helped to contain this northeastern penetration. At the same time, they inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy troops in their bunkered positions. Spectre also forced the enemy soldiers into the open where they were hit by small arms fire or triggered mechanical ambushes.

(C) In countering the assault on An Loc, MG Hollingsworth employed 297 sorties of tactical air support on 11 May, and approximately 260 sorties on each of the following four days. He had borrowed



LTC Gordon Wood, commander of the USAF 8th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) selects a target over An Loc. Operating out of Bien Hoa AB, the 8th SOS provided a major portion of TACAIR support for ARVN defenders.

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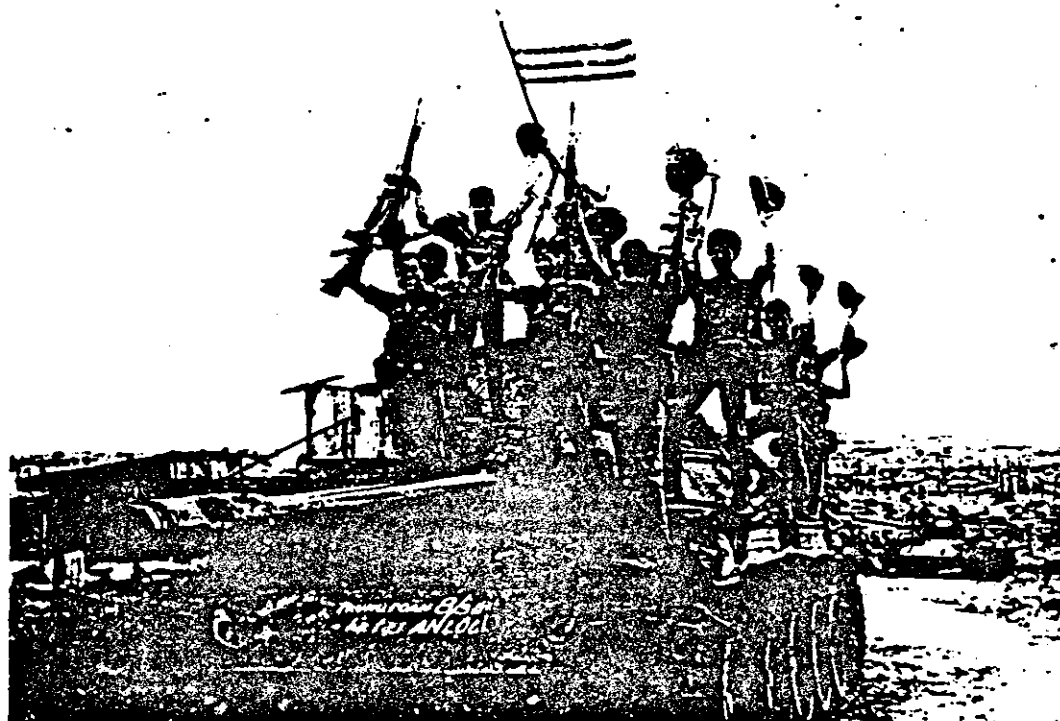
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five additional B-52 strikes from Military Region 2 to bring the total to 30 strikes within a 24 hour period. This overwhelming use of firepower was effective in supplementing the efforts of the ARVN troops within the perimeter. One example occurred on 11 May, when approximately 40 tanks and armored vehicles attempted to enter An Loc. By noon on 13 May they had been destroyed. During the fighting several crews had abandoned their tanks and had rallied to the ARVN forces in the city.¹⁰

(U) The rapid succession of B-52 strikes was heartwarming to the defenders on the ground in An Loc. Not aware of the discussions between GEN Abrams and MG Hollingsworth, one advisor was incredulous. "The surprisingly fast B-52 strikes that we received on the eleventh of May were just unbelievable," remembered CPT Moffett with the rangers. "I couldn't believe that we got so many

B-52 strikes so fast." The bombs landed within 600 meters of the ARVN forces on the perimeter with only a few soldiers wounded as they were getting into their bunkers. The effectiveness of the big bombers was apparent to all observers inside An Loc, who called for them to be dropped closer to the defensive lines.

(U) The B-52s used in close ground support proved to be a flexible system as well. BG McGiffert estimated that over 90 percent of the strikes were diverted from their original targets on 11 and 12 May. As the ground targets appeared, close cooperation between MG Hollingsworth's staff, MACV J-3, and the Strategic Air Command Advanced Echelon at MACV Headquarters permitted a change of target within an hour before the bombers were due to release their ordnance. In one case the 81st Airborne Ranger Group was subjected to intensive pressure from an enemy regi-



Jubilant ARVN soldiers with a T-54 tank captured during the enemy attack on 11 May.

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ment, and a B-52 strike was diverted to hit this troop concentration. The regiment was eliminated as an effective fighting force.¹¹

(C) By noon of the eleventh the employment of firepower from the air, combined with a steady resistance on the ground, had broken the enemy attack. MG Hollingsworth reported to GEN Abrams that the attack had been thwarted by noon, with many enemy soldiers fleeing in a state of disorganization from the areas that had been struck by the B-52s. These panicked troops were attacked by the tactical aircraft and ground fire as they ran. During the afternoon no moving enemy tanks were reported and attacks by indirect fire fell off considerably. Several NVA tanks were found abandoned after receiving friendly fire.¹²

(C) By 2000 hours on 12 May there were indications that the enemy was preparing to launch another attack in his abortive attempt to capture the province capital. Tank fire from standoff positions hit the city, and there was a continuous exchange of small arms fire around the perimeter. Worsening weather complicated the support available to the defenders, but AC-130 Spectre gunships were able to remain on station and keep the enemy off-balance. The B-52 strikes continued to come at regular intervals, and MG Hollingsworth reported to GEN Abrams that the heavy bombers "spoiled" another apparent enemy effort to seize An Loc. Although the TRAC commander felt that the situation remained serious, he was confident that the city would hold out.¹³

(C) On 13 May enemy attacks by indirect fire were moderate, and standoff tank fire was reported from the south, west, and north. At 0145 hours on 14 May enemy troop movement was noticed to the west and southwest of the city, together with more tank fire from the west. MG Hollingsworth thought that the enemy was going to try another assault. "If so," he wired GEN Abrams the next day, "he was dissuaded by the timely delivery of three ARC LIGHTS." Once again, the B-52 strikes had been decisive. By midmorning, the two salients had been reduced in size and most of the occupied territory returned to ARVN control. The tide of the battle had turned.¹⁴

(C) Enemy indirect fire continued to decrease on 15 May. There were no significant engagements that day. The situation had stabilized. By nightfall the enemy had withdrawn except for the company size forces in the two smaller salients. "The enemy had lost his capability for further offensive actions in Binh Long Province," concluded MG Hollingsworth.¹⁵

(U) For the next ten days the situation at An Loc remained stalemated. Contacts with enemy forces were significantly reduced, although artillery

and antiaircraft fire remained heavy. The 3th ARVN Division advisors estimated that the enemy was turning his attention toward the South Vietnamese forces attempting to advance along Route 13 toward An Loc from the south. Although enemy activity within the two small salients dwindled, ARVN forces were unable to reduce them easily. The enemy fought stubbornly from bunkered positions. Finally the western salient was successfully flanked by the 3th ARVN Regiment, and the task there became one of cleaning out the remaining pockets of resistance.¹⁶

RELIEF FROM THE SOUTH

(U) The operation to clear Route 13 had been bogged down by enemy resistance from the beginning. The 21st ARVN Division had closed on Lai Khe on 12 April after disengaging from heavy fighting in the Delta's U Minh Forest. Initially the division had been assigned the mission to secure the highway north from Lai Khe to Chon Thanh. The first major engagement occurred during 24 to 29 April thirteen kilometers north of Lai Khe as the 21st Division sought to fight its way toward Chon Thanh. The 101st Independent NVA Regiment had blocked the road on 22 April, eleven days after the 32d ARVN Regiment had moved the vehicle to Chon Thanh. The 32d Regiment attacked from the north in combination with the 23d ARVN Regiment from the south to destroy the enemy force. On 27 April the 101st NVA Regiment withdrew to the west, leaving the K-6 Battalion of the 165th NVA Regiment in contact to cover the disengagement. The remnants of this battalion were driven from their heavily fortified positions two days later.

(U) With the road now clear to Chon Thanh, the 21st Division began offensive operations north of the base where the 31st ARVN Regiment, airlifted there during the fighting to the south, had encountered increasing enemy resistance. Six kilometers north of Chon Thanh the other two battalions of the 165th NVA Regiment had occupied strong defensive positions. The fighting raged for the first 13 days of May, supported by military tactical air, and B-52 strikes. At some point late in the battle the enemy reinforced with the 209th NVA Regiment. During the fighting the commander of the 31st Regiment was seriously wounded and control over the operation passed to the 32d Regiment. On 13 May the enemy position was finally overrun. The South Vietnamese now had control over the highway to a point eight kilometers north of Chon Thanh.

(U) Fresh from this latest victory in the advance up Route 13, the 32d ARVN Regiment was given the mission of clearing the enemy to the Tau O Bridge, five kilometers to the north. The opposing force was the strongly reinforced 209th NVA Regi-

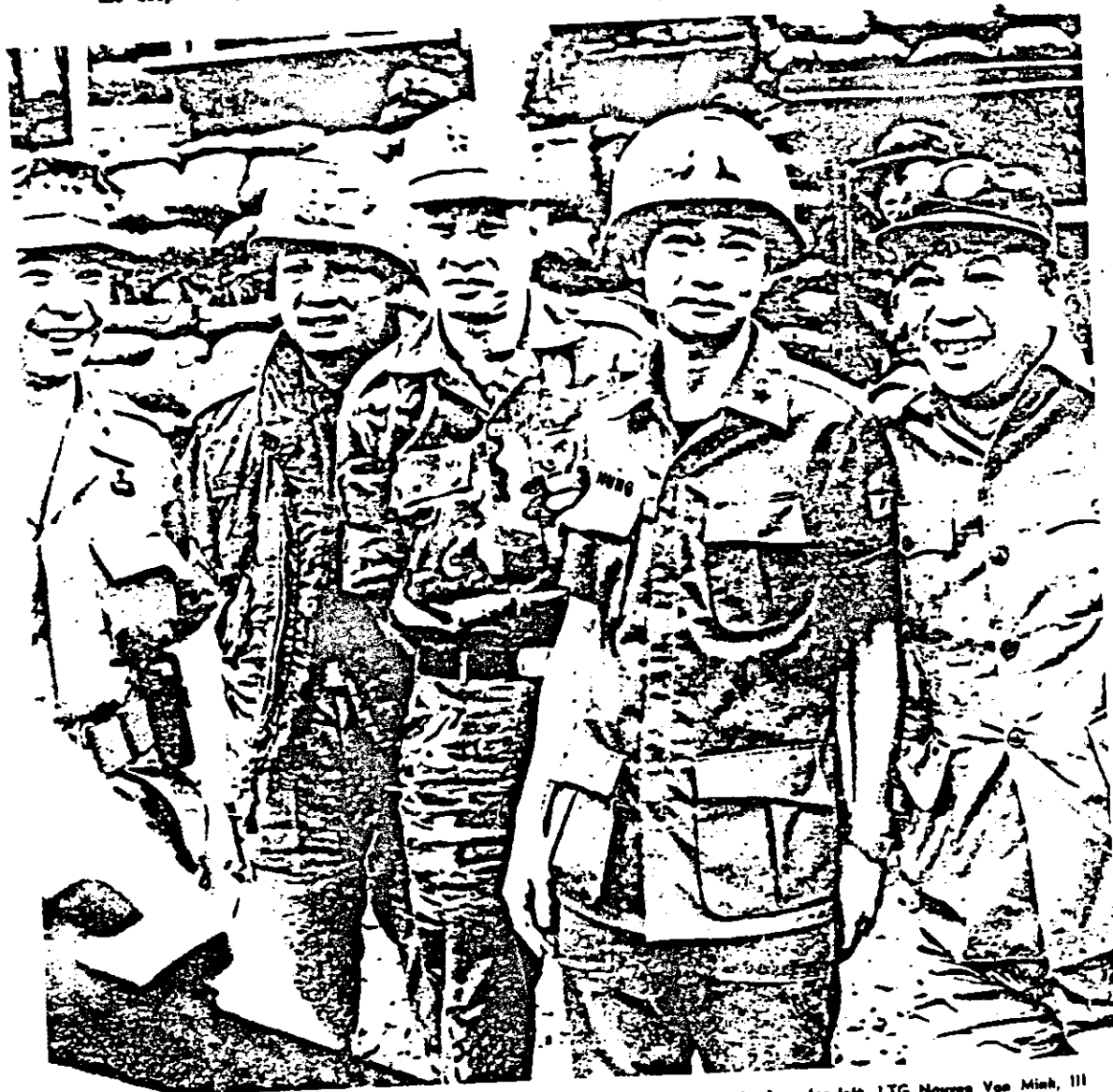
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ment, which had fallen back to heavily fortified positions in depth. This network was centered on the deep swamps of the Tau O stream. For 18

days the 2d ARVN Regiment fought to push the enemy out of the area. Despite extensive use of B-52s, tactical air support, and artillery, the ARVN



Principal Vietnamese commanders with President Thieu after the battle for An Loc: far left, LTG Nguyen Van Minh, III Corps Commander; third from left, GEN Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff; fourth from left, BG Le Van Hung, 5th ARVN Division Commander.

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forces were unsuccessful. On 21 June the 32d ARVN Regiment was relieved of the mission. However, the drive of the regiment north had pulled enemy forces away from the An Loc perimeter in late May, easing the situation in the besieged province capital.

(U) The last major battle at An Loc was fought concurrently with the fighting at the Tau O Bridge. Enemy pressure on the city made relief by outside ground forces essential. An urgent requirement was the deployment of artillery support to a position capable of supporting both the 32d ARVN Regiment in its attempt to drive north and the defenders within the An Loc perimeter. Accordingly, on 15 May the 15th Regiment, which had arrived from the 9th ARVN Division in the Delta three days earlier, was given the mission to secure and establish this fire base. On that day the 1st Battalion of the regiment and the 9th Armored Cavalry Regiment began their attack. The task force bypassed enemy resistance to the east of Route 13 and moved in the direction of Tan Khai hamlet, ten kilometers south of An Loc and four kilometers north of the Tau O Bridge. Simultaneously, the 2d Battalion, 15th Regiment, and the regimental command group made an air assault into the Tan Khai area. On 16 May they secured the hamlet. Later in the day, VNAF Chinooks and an American Sky Crane brought in three 105mm howitzers and a platoon of 155mm howitzers. The following day, the 3d Battalion, the regimental light command post, and the 33d Regiment (-) reached the new fire support base. On 18 May, the armor and infantry column, delayed by the difficult terrain to the southeast, closed on the hamlet.

(U) For a few days enemy activity in the vicinity of the fire base was negligible. By 20 May the enemy had turned his attention away from An Loc and reacted to the threat from the south. That day the 141st NVA Regiment, which had just moved from An Loc, launched an attack against the base. This initial battle lasted for three days. The defenders of Tan Khai held out against this and all subsequent attacks through June. The existence of this base brought the needed relief from enemy pressure to the defenders of An Loc."

(U) The weary ARVN forces within the An Loc perimeter took advantage of the respite afforded by the move of enemy troops to the south. Patrolling outward from the defenses increased, and the bodies of many enemy dead were discovered. As the South Vietnamese troops regained an aggressive spirit, clearing operations were begun against the northern salient. On 8 June the 1st Battalion, 48th ARVN Regiment, eliminated the last enemy resistance in the northern salient. By 12 June the remaining pockets of resistance in the former

western salient were reduced by the 7th ARVN Regiment. The situation continued to improve on 13 and 14 June when 1,500 fresh troops, mostly from the 18th ARVN Division, were lifted into the city by American helicopters.

(U) By 15 June, with enemy indirect fire continuing to decrease, the 5th ARVN Division began offensive operations, pushing out in all directions from the perimeter. The 48th Regiment seized Hill 149 on 17 June. From this regained vantage point, they observed several concentrations of enemy troops. Tactical air support was called, and the enemy formations were dispersed after suffering heavy casualties. Small contacts continued all around the city as enemy bunkers were systematically reduced. Large amounts of enemy equipment were captured. On 18 June control of the 1st Airborne Brigade reverted directly to III Corps, and the brigade moved the next day by foot to Tan Khai for airlift out of the An Loc area. Rallyers and prisoners of war reported at both An Loc and Tan Khai that the enemy had taken large losses and that many more enemy troops were ready to rally."

(U) Although Route 13 had not been reopened and fighting continued as ARVN forces attacked to regain territory around An Loc, the enemy offensive in Binh Long Province had ended. By 18 June the situation around An Loc had improved to the point that LTC Minh, the III Corps Commander, declared that the siege was over."

(C) The remainder of the year was spent in pushing the enemy back from An Loc and in exchanging fresh troops for those who had participated in the defense of the province capital. On 11 July the 18th ARVN Division completed its relief of the 5th ARVN Division at An Loc. The 25th ARVN Division began the relief of the 21st ARVN Division on Route 13 north of Chon Thanh. Given the mission of reducing the enemy blocking force at the Tau O Bridge, the 25th ARVN Division enveloped the strong point and neutralized it on 20 July. The road was still subject to harassing and interdiction fire, however, and considerable mine-sweeping and roadwork were necessary before the highway could be opened for traffic.

(C) During August the 18th Division began operations to recapture the Quan Loi airfield and base camp. The first step was to gain control of the high ground to the east of Quan Loi. As the operation went into its next phase, the advance slowed as the 18th Division neared the well-prepared defensive positions of the base camp. The tough going made replacement of the lead battalions necessary on 23 August; the attack continued on the following day. By 4 September the

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18th Division had breached the Quan Loi perimeter and established a lodgment that included the southwestern end of the airstrip. The attempt to secure the rest of Quan Loi stalled when the 52d Regiment, 18th ARVN Division, failed to secure the dominating high ground north of Quan Loi.

(C) In late September, as III Corps prepared for an enemy siph point in October, attention shifted from the An Loc-Quan Loi area of operations. Divisional elements were moved to the south to cover the northern approaches to Saigon. Although the 18th ARVN Division remained in the An Loc area, the Quan Loi base camp was not recaptured. When there appeared the possibility of a cease-fire in late October, III Corps stabilized in a defensive posture. By 29 November the 18th Division had been relieved by the 3d, 5th, and 6th Ranger Groups, a total of nine battalions. Through the rest of the

year and into the cease-fire period, the rangers secured the approaches to An Loc.

(U) The successful defense of An Loc saved Saigon from a direct threat. By denying the Viet Cong a province capital close to Saigon in which to set up a "liberation" government, the South Vietnamese dealt their opponents not only a military defeat but also a severe psychological and propaganda defeat as well. More tangible benefits were also realized. Regular and territorial forces had cooperated well in coordinating the defense, and the heroism of the local soldiers was noteworthy. South Vietnamese troops overcame panic when first faced with an attack by armor and defeated Soviet-made medium tanks with relative ease. The battle of An Loc stands as a classic case of a besieged city holding out against overwhelming odds, aided both by their own tenacity and by airpower.

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AN LOC — ANNEX J

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3. Journal (C), G2/G3, TRAC, 4 Apr 72, Gp-Not Stated.
4. Memo (U), BG John R. McGiffert, undtd, Subj: An Loc Draft (BG McGiffert was Deputy CG, TRAC during the siege of An Loc).
5. Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 020310Z Apr 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation (U), Gp-Not Stated.
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7. Rpt (FOUO), 5th DCAT, Adv Tm 70, 20 Jul 72, Subj: After-Action Report, Binh Long Campaign, 1972, Appendix 1.
8. Ibid., p 5; Msg (C), TRAC to COMUSMACV, 060207Z Apr 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation (U), Gp-Not Stated.
9. Same as #7, p 5.
10. Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 070315Z Apr 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation (U), Gp-Not Stated.
11. Msg (C), CG, TRAC to all US Elms MR3, 7 Apr 72, Subj: Tactical Alert (U), Gp-Not Stated.
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14. Same as #7, p 6.
15. Rpt (C), 18th ARVN Div, undtd, Subj: After-Action Report, Binh Long Campaign 1972 (U), Gp-Not Stated; Interview (U), CPT Marvin C. Zumwalt, Advisor, 52d ARVN Regt, by MAJ John Cash, MACV MHB, 18 Apr 72, Saigon.
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18. Same as #7.
19. Interview (U), BG McGiffert; Same as #2, pp 11-12; Same as #7, p 10.
20. Ibid.; Interview (U), CPT Moffett, DSA, 3d Rgr Gu, by MAJ John Cash, MACV MHB, 1 Jun 72, HQ, TRAC, Long Binh, RVN (Hereafter referred to as Interview (U), CPT Moffett).
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22. Interview (U), CPT Moffett, pp 3-8.
23. Draft USAF CHECO Rpt (S/NF), Paul T. Eingenbach and Peter J. Mally, "The Battle for An Loc, 5 April-28 June 1972" (U), pp 17-18, GDS-Not Stated (Hereafter referred to as Draft CHECO Rpt); Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 140220Z Apr 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation (U), Gp-4.
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25. Msg (C), Same as #23.
26. Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 150225Z Apr 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation (U), Gp-4.
27. Same as #7, Appendix 18.
28. Draft CHECO Rpt, p 19; Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 160315Z Apr 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation (U), Gp-4.
29. Same as #7, pp 11-12.
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31. Same as #7, p 12.
32. Ibid., p 13.
33. Same as #2, pp 13-16; Same as #4.
34. Same as #7, pp 13-18.
35. Ibid.; Draft CHECO Rpt, p 26.
36. Draft CHECO Rpt, pp 26-27.
37. Ibid., p 27; Same as #7, p 39.
38. Draft CHECO Rpt, pp 27-31.
39. Ibid., pp 31-38; Same as #7, pp 39-40.
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41. Interview (U), CPT Moffett.
42. Ibid.; Interview (U), BG McGiffert, p 20; Same as #7, pp 43-44; Interview (U), COL William Miller, SA, 5th ARVN Div by staff, TRAC, undtd, Long Binh, RVN (Hereafter referred to as Interview (U), COL Miller).
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 49. Interview (U), CPT Moffett.
 50. Same as #2, pp 19-22.
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 52. Same as #2; Interview (U), BG McGiffert.
 53. Same as #7, pp 16-17; Same as #2, pp 23-24.
 54. Interview (U), BG McGiffert; Interview (U),
CPT Moffett.
 55. Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 120227Z
May 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation
(U), Gp-4.
 56. Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 140208Z
May 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation
(U), Gp-4.
 57. Ibid.
 58. Msg (C), CG, TRAC to COMUSMACV, 160220Z
May 72, Subj: Daily Commander's Evaluation
(U), Gp-4; Same as #2.
 59. Same as #7, p 18.
 60. Ibid., Annex F (21st ARVN Div).
 61. Ibid., pp 18-20.
 62. STARS AND STRIPES (Pacific Edition), June
18, 1972, p 6.

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ANNEX K

KONTUM

THE NVA BUILDUP

(U) Military Region 2, the largest tactical zone in The Republic of Vietnam, contained 47 percent of the country's total land area (See Fig. K-1). However, it contained only three million people or about one-fifth of the population. For this reason, in the rolling, sparsely populated Central Highlands, neither side tried very hard to win. Both North Vietnamese Army/Viet Cong (NVA/VC) forces and Army of Vietnam (ARVN) troops were used in economy of force roles. Each year during the dry season the Annamite Mountains in Kontum Province became an area of increasing enemy activity; 1972 was no exception.¹ The drawdown of US maneuver battalions and the relegation of the remaining 60,000 US military personnel in Vietnam to advisory roles resulted in Vietnamese responsibility for the war in the region. Failure of the American Vietnamization program would be a disastrous blow to US foreign policy and give the enemy a decided advantage at the negotiating table.

(C) As early as the middle of December 1971, allied forces in the Central Highlands of Military Region 2 began to receive reports of preparations being made by the enemy for a major offensive in the winter/spring of 1972. ARVN intelligence reports and interrogation of PWs and Ho Chianghs revealed large scale enemy troop movements from base areas in Cambodia and Laos into northern Kontum Province. These sources also reported that the campaign would be a 3-phase offensive with Phase I from 27 January until 7 February; Phase II from 7 February to 14 February; Phase III from 14 February to 29 February. The high point of the offensive was to be characterized by attacks on Tan Canh/Dak To I, the fire support bases on Rocket Ridge, and the main population centers of Kontum City and Pleiku City.² In addition, VC local force activity in the southern portion of Military Region 2 and in the coastal provinces would increase in an attempt to scatter widely the ARVN forces and thus make the highlands vulnerable to a multi-divisional attack in Kontum Province. With the supporting attacks of VC units in traditionally VC-dominated Binh Dinh Province, a success on the Kontum battlefield would enable the NVA to cut the Republic of Vietnam in two and thus discredit the Vietnamization Program. Intelligence sources identified the controlling headquarters for the impending NVA offensive in the Central Highlands

as the B-3 Front. Its major combat units were the 320th NVA Division, the 2d NVA Division, and the organic combat units of the B-3 Front which equalled another division. These NVA units were supplemented by VC main force and local force units and the 203d Armor Regiment from Hanoi High Command.³

(C) Due to increasing indications of an impending offensive, the US advisors in Military Region 2 worked closely with their counterparts to utilize the remaining US assets in Vietnam. These assets were the air cavalry, tactical air support (TACAIR), and B-52 strikes. The air cavalry was used to reconnoiter known enemy base areas along the tri-border region of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam and also to the northwest of Kontum City in the Plei Trap Valley. The air cavalry and the USAF forward air controllers were able to detect enemy training areas containing mock-up tanks, mortar positions, and large bunker complexes.⁴

(C) During the last week of January the first sightings were made of enemy armor activity east of Base Area 609 (See Fig. K-2). On 25 January two Cobra gunship pilots from the 361st Aerial Weapons Company reported engaging two tanks in the Plei Trap Valley (not indicated on map) just west of Rocket Ridge. The pilots also saw four other tanks under trees in the area. In this same area another Cobra team reported sighting six sets of tracks made by armored vehicles. Subsequent visual reconnaissance did not locate the tanks, but the tracks indicated that the enemy had at least one armor company in the area. Further tank sightings by US gunships occurred on 30 January and sporadically thereafter. Because these reports could not be substantiated by ground reconnaissance, little credence was given to them by the SRAG advisory staff.

(C) Through the results of these reconnaissance efforts and the patrolling of the Border Rangers from fire support bases at Dak Pek, Dak Seang, and Ben Het, the US advisors were able to conduct over 60 B-52 strikes during the month of January. Friendly territorial forces, the Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF), increased their activity during January by conducting several ground and airmobile operations in battalion strengths, while ARVN regular forces concentrated on strengthening their defenses in Kontum and Binh Dinh Provinces.⁵

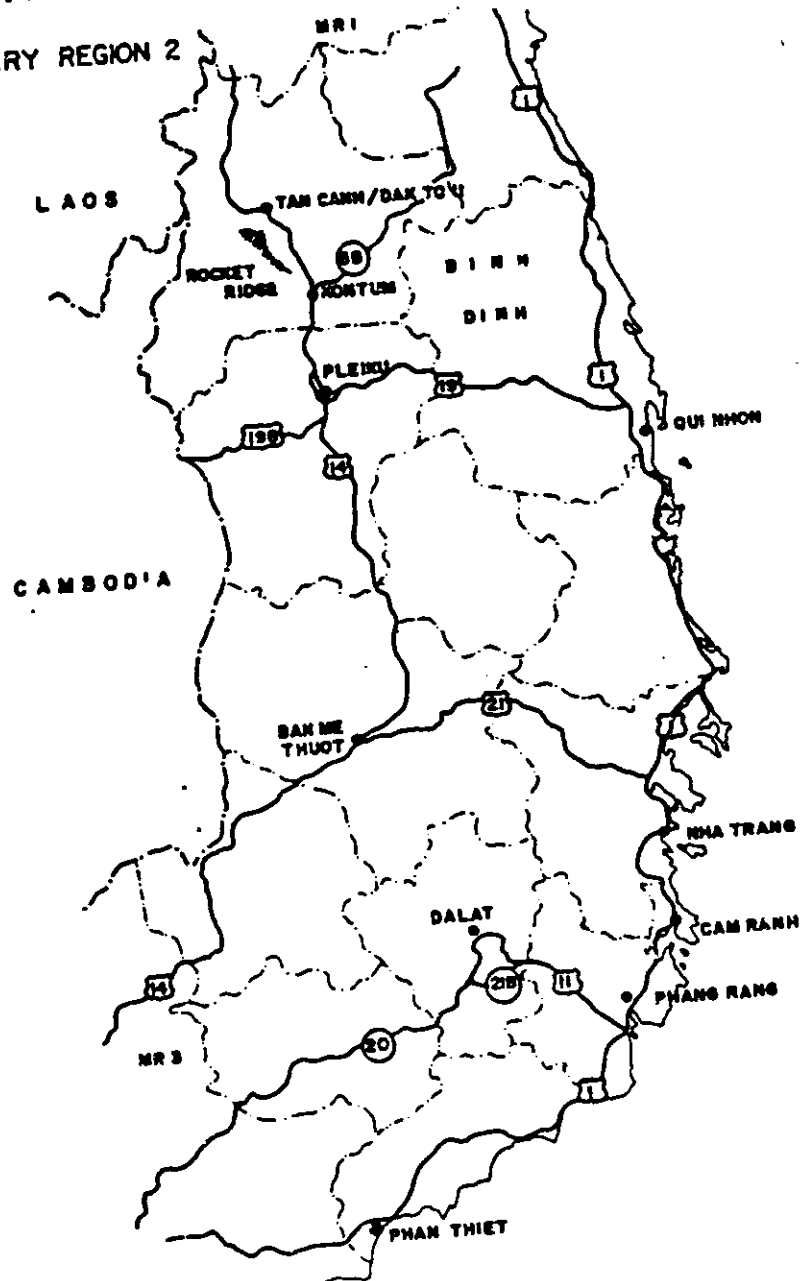
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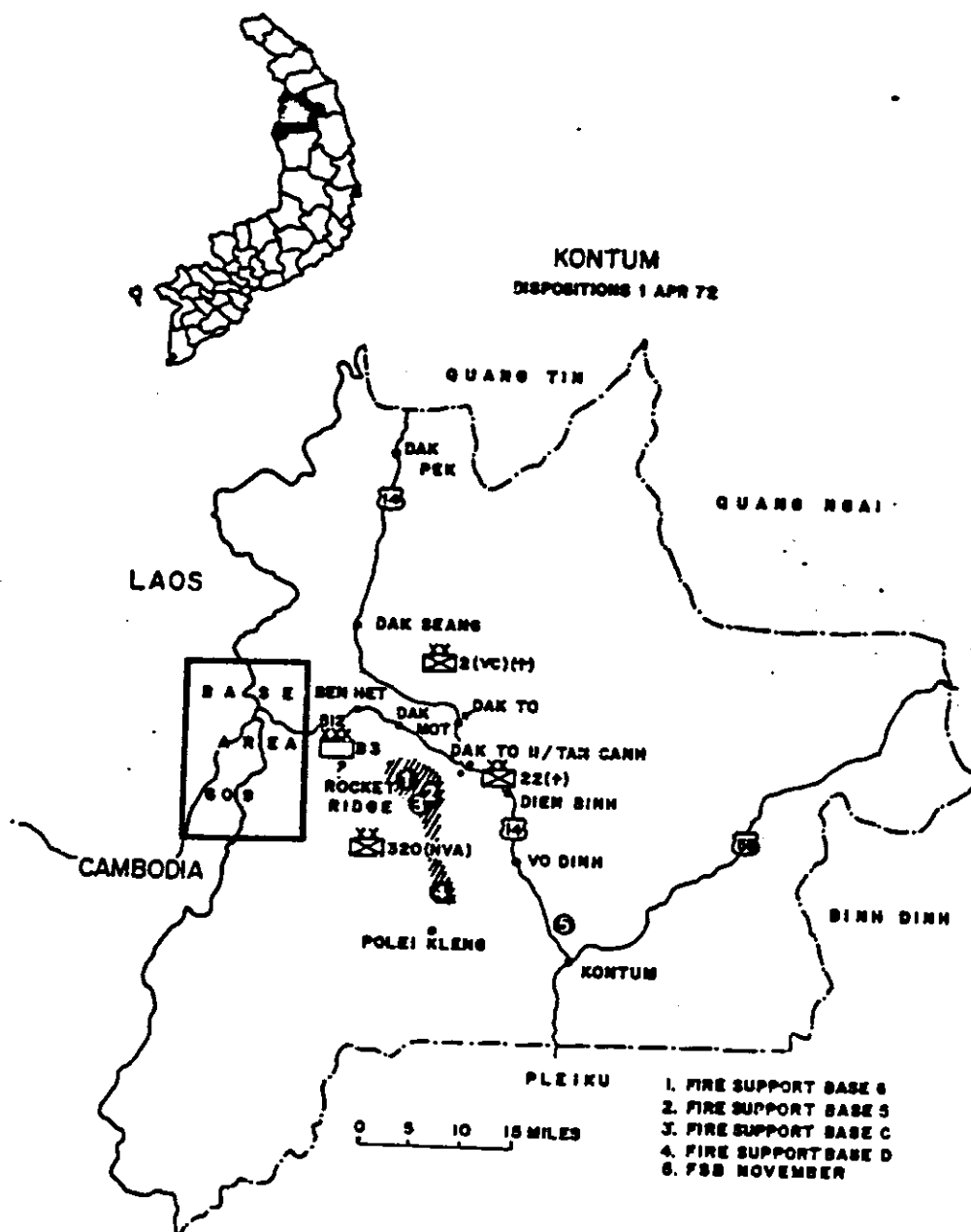
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(U) Upon evaluation of all available intelligence, the ARVN II Corps staff, led by LTG Ngo Dzu, planned the defense of the Central Highlands. While the US advisors were kept informed of all developments, the Vietnamese themselves formulated the defense plan. The key US figure in this process was Mr. John Paul Vann, the only civilian ever selected to head the advisory effort in one of South Vietnam's military regions. Vann had spent over 11 years in Vietnam, first as an army officer and then as a civilian, and was highly respected among the Vietnamese people.¹¹

(U) During the first week of February the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) and US air cavalry continued to report sightings of enemy armor, as tensions began to build. Documents captured during the week of 4 to 10 February confirmed the presence of the 320th NVA Division in the B-3 Front. One document also stated that the 320th was composed of the 48th, 52d, and 64th Infantry Regiments and the 54th Artillery Regiment. The total strength of the division and its special battalions was listed at 10,400 men. An accompanying document revealed that both 122mm and 130mm Soviet field guns with ranges up to 17 miles were being infiltrated to the triborder area.¹²

(U) As a result of this information LTG Dzu ordered COL Le Duc Dat, the new commander of the ARVN 22d Division, to move the division forward CP, the 47th Regiment, and logistical support to the Tan Canh/Dak To II area, which was already occupied by the 22d Division's 42d Regiment. The movement of the logistical and division main elements from the division base camp in Ba Gi, Binh Dinh, was accomplished on the 7th and 8th of February.¹³ In addition, elements of the 19th Cavalry Regiment were ordered to the Tan Canh area to reinforce the division's organic 14th Cavalry Regiment. COL Dat placed this new armor support at Ben Het because he felt that any NVA armor assault must come from that direction. LTC Tuong, the II Corps senior armor officer, argued against this deployment since it tied the armor to static positions. He felt that these units should be kept free for a mobile defense.¹⁴ The 2d Airborne Brigade from the Government of Vietnam's strategic reserve was also committed to the fire support bases on Rocket Ridge. LTG Dzu then defined his command structure. COL Dat was placed in command of the Dak To area to include the border ranger camps at Ben Het, Dak Mot, Dak Pek, Dak Seang, and Fire Support Bases 5 and 6. COL Long, Kontum Province Chief, was responsible for Kontum City and COL Tuong, the Corps Deputy for Operations, was given command in Pleiku.¹⁵

(C) Tet passed however, and there was no offensive. Nevertheless, the evidence of enemy battlefield

preparation continued to increase. In an effort to disrupt the enemy's timetable the USAF flew more than 80 B-52 missions in the Tan Canh area during the first three weeks of February.¹¹

(C) President Nixon's visit to Communist China from 21 to 28 February led many to believe that the enemy would attempt widespread activity to discredit this important meeting between the two powers. Once again the enemy acted contrary to intelligence estimates. He continued to avoid direct engagements but increased his interdicting attacks on the lines of communication and minor installations. The number of prisoners and Hoi Chanh detentions increased to a trickle. In previous years, this had signaled impending attack. Surveillance continued to detect an eastward movement of enemy supplies into Kontum Province in greater amounts than ever before. Still, the offensive was delayed because the NVA/VC units had difficulty in moving their supplies forward into attack positions due to heavy US B-52 and TACAIR strikes on the base areas in response to air cavalry surveillance and ARVN intelligence reports. Therefore, the Tet period was peaceful. Nevertheless, enemy preparation of the battlefield included bunker and road construction, reconnaissance operations, and movement into attack positions, all of which portended a massive enemy offensive. The attack awaited only an adequate enemy personnel and logistical situation and favorable weather conditions.¹²

(C) To further bolster the defense of the highlands, the Airborne Division Headquarters and another brigade moved to Kontum in the first week of March and took over responsibility for defense of Kontum City and the southern portion of Kontum Province. After the middle of March contacts with larger enemy units began to increase significantly. One major incident was initiated by the actions of the 2d Airborne Brigade along Rocket Ridge, which resulted in the capture of several PWs and one Hoi Chanh. The contacts were with NVA battalion size forces and marked the end of the period of enemy reluctance to engage in major combat. The rallier and PWs reported that the 320th NVA Division would support the B-3 Front and participate in an offensive during the period April to September. These sources also reported seeing many tanks in the base areas through which they had moved and hearing that NVA armor units would accompany B-3 Front ground forces during the coming offensive. They also told of massive casualties and material destruction inflicted on units in their area by B-52 strikes.¹³

(U) There were three other significant enemy contacts. One of these occurred 30 kilometers north of Kontum City where the 23d Ranger Battalion was surrounded while assessing a B-52 strike.

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Heavy tactical airstrikes, artillery, and supporting B-52 strikes were required to assist the rangers' breakout. A lesser engagement occurred between the 96th Border Ranger Battalion and the 141st Regiment, 2d NVA Division, north of Ben Het. At the end of the month elements of the 47th Regiment and the 2d Airborne Brigade again made heavy contact along Rocket Ridge. The friendly forces took a heavy toll of the attacking NVA forces with the support of B-52s and US and VNAF tactical air.

(C) These successful ARVN offensive actions and the enemy failure to launch his announced offensive on schedule unduly affected the II Corps staff; they began to doubt whether the enemy possessed the capability to attack his stated objectives. They felt that the continued pressure on the enemy through increased patrolling, the aggressiveness of the 2d Airborne Brigade, and the relentless use of available air resources had harassed the enemy sufficiently to delay his preparation of the battlefield. Therefore, continued ARVN aggressive ground activity and massive air support would deny the enemy the initiative and reduce the size, duration, and effectiveness of the planned offensive.¹¹

(C) In the first week of April this estimate appeared to be accurate as the 320th NVA Division's 48th and 82nd Regiments sustained heavy losses in assaults on the fire bases on Rocket Ridge. B-52s and tactical aircraft continued to pound at the massed enemy forces in this area until four to five enemy battalions were rendered combat ineffective. A prisoner taken in one of these attacks confirmed this information. He reported that reinforcements were infiltrating daily, however, and the units were regaining their original strength. At the same time the 42d and 47th ARVN Regiments were in heavy contact north and east of Dak To with elements of the 2d NVA Division and the 66th Regiment of the enemy B-3 Front. Prisoners captured in these contacts indicated that the mission of the 2d Division was to seize Dak To II airfield and the headquarters of the 42d ARVN Regiment at Tan Canh, as well as to destroy friendly artillery units along Provincial Route 512. The 66th Regiment had reconnoitered the Tan Canh compound and was in

the final planning stages for the attack. The prisoners did not know the time for the attack but were certain that it was imminent.¹²

(C) Hearing these reports, LTG Dzu felt that he had insufficient forces in the Dak To area to counter a multi-divisional NVA attack. He wanted to bolster the Dak To forces with nine ARVN battalions from Binh Dinh and thus leave that province stripped of ARVN regular forces and defended only by territorial forces. Mr. Vann, however, convinced LTG Dzu that such a move might prove disastrous. Vann proposed that the area of operations of the 23d Division be adjusted to give it some responsibility in Kontum and thus eliminate the need to move the battalions from Binh Dinh. With this plan the friendly order of battle showed the 22d Division with a total of 13 battalions consisting of three border ranger battalions, eight ARVN infantry battalions and scout companies, cavalry, sector forces, and 50 tubes of artillery; the Airborne Division with six airborne battalions, one border ranger battalion, and 16 tubes of artillery; Kontum sector with a ranger group of two battalions and territorial forces; and 50 tanks belonging to the 19th and 141st Cavalry Regiments spread between Pleiku and Ben Het.

(C) This realignment strained the logistical support of ARVN forces north of Vo Dinh due to the limited capability of the single road into the area. In this posture the ARVN forces were extremely vulnerable to an envelopment which would isolate all forces north of Vo Dinh. However, LTG Dzu ignored these logistical problems, perhaps because he was under orders from President Thieu to hold territory at all costs. The pressure continued to increase, however, as the enemy buildup continued.

(C) His problems were compounded by the ineffective leadership of COL Dat, the 22d Division Commander, whose inept handling of a combat assault by the 9th Airborne Battalion resulted in the loss of two helicopters, a failure to exploit two B-52 strikes, and divisiveness between the 22d Division and the Airborne Division.¹³

THE ATTACK ON TAN CANH

(U) On 14 April Fire Support Base Charlie (See Fig. K-3) on the northern end of Rocket Ridge received over 300 mixed 105mm howitzer and 75mm recoilless rifle rounds followed by a ground attack from the 48th NVA Regiment. Although US Cobras and tactical aircraft were able to slow the initial advance, at 2230 hours the 11th Airborne Battalion was forced to withdraw. MAJ John Duffy, the Senior Advisor to the battalion, was the last to

leave the position. He noted that five of the nine enemy antiaircraft guns that had ringed the fire base had been destroyed and that as many as 1,000 bodies from the attacking enemy forces were lying on the perimeter wire.¹⁴

(C) The 42d and 47th ARVN Regiments continued their attempts to control the ridgelines around Tan Canh and Dak To II, but slowly fell back to the main compound. On the 19th the 1st Battalion of

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the 42d was isolated by an estimated two enemy battalions, making resupply impossible. COL Dat made only feeble attempts to relieve this force. On the 1st, after running out of ammunition, 63 of the 360 men in the battalion filtered back to the regimental compound.¹⁰

(U) On 30 April, the Vietnamese Joint General Staff required the release of one airborne brigade of three battalions and the division light command post from Military Region II. To fill the gap, the 6th Ranger Group was brought in from Hue, and the 23d Division assumed the old Airborne Division area of operations with its 53d Regiment.

(U) At 1930 hours on 31 April, after several days of heavy artillery attacks, the ARVN forces at Fire Support Base Delta on Rocket Ridge were overrun. The defenders, composed of one airborne company and one company of the 2d Ranger Group, had held until an NVA attack supported by three tanks forced them to withdraw. On 22 April in order to effect the setbacks on Rocket Ridge and give depth to the battlefield, LTC Dsu moved some of his artillery to Dien Binh in Dak To District. Vann had urged this move for several weeks but had been previously unable to convince Dsu of its value.¹⁰

(U) By 23 April the defenses in the Tan Canh area appeared adequate. The airborne brigade and rangers at the fire support bases on Rocket Ridge were well supplied. Their American advisors considered them to be excellent combat units. The 47th ARVN Regiment at Dak To II had a company of tanks and one airborne battalion in support. They also had two 106mm recoilless rifles and numerous M-72 light antitank weapons (LAW). The 22d Division at Tan Canh had the 42d Regiment and one battalion of the 41st Regiment near the compound. The garrison comprised 1,200 troops, which included 900 from the support elements not organized into the defensive plan of the compound. For antitank defense the compound had two 106mm recoilless rifles, over one hundred M-72s, and a company of M-41 tanks. More than 50 tubes of 106mm and 160mm artillery were in support. The area appeared to be prepared for the multi-division attack which threatened.¹⁰

(U) By 23 April, although signs of an imminent enemy offensive had been present since early January, the long awaited campaign had not yet begun. Contacts with large units of regular NVA forces had increased significantly in the previous two weeks as the Tan Canh/Dak To II area had become encircled by hostile forces. The artillery fire had increased from 20 to 50 rounds per day in late March and early April to approximately 1,000 rounds a day in the previous two weeks. The enemy had already secured key terrain to the north and

east of the Tan Canh compound and were able to place accurate observed fire onto the forces inside.

(U) Lying on top of a bunker on the northeast side of the Tan Canh perimeter on 23 April, CPT Raymond H. Dobbins, acting Senior Advisor to the 42d ARVN Regiment, paid little attention to the constant volleys of artillery and rocket fire which fell like rain on the beleaguered 22d Division forward compound. Although he was completely exposed to this deadly and accurate fire, he calmly and methodically directed US airstrikes onto targets given him by his Vietnamese counterpart. He knew that one battalion of the 42d, supported by four M-41 tanks, in a nearby operation was also taking a fierce pounding from the mixed 122mm rocket, 130mm artillery, and 82mm mortar fire and needed the US airpower he was coordinating if they were to clear the area which was dangerously close to their perimeter. His attention was momentarily diverted to the area of the main gate where one of the M-41 tanks had gone to unload a crewman who had been wounded by small arms fire. At that moment a brilliant flash and accompanying roar signified that the tank had been hit by an enemy antitank weapon and destroyed. Due to the frequency with which the enemy had been utilizing the B-40 rocket, the Vietnamese immediately reported this as the cause of the explosion to CPT Dobbins. Dobbins quickly radioed a spot report to the division tactical operations center (DIOC) where the call was taken by MAJ Jon Wise, the GS advisor who brought it to the attention of COL Philip Kaplan, the Senior Advisor to the 22d Division and LTC Terrence McClain, the Deputy Senior Advisor at the 22d DIOC. After a brief discussion the three agreed that the terrain was not suitable for a B-40 rocket since its effective range is only 200 meters and the enemy was over 500 meters from where the tank was hit. COL Kaplan, LTC McClain and MAJ George Carter, the Senior Advisor to the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment, proceeded to the destroyed tank. At that moment a wire guided missile whizzed over their heads and struck another tank some 150 meters to the north of their position at the main gate. LTC McClain ran to the vehicle gathering up some 30 to 40 meters of thin copper wire. He noticed a small hole about the size of a silver dollar in the frontal armor. Underneath the tank was the tail assembly of a rocket. Examination revealed this assembly to be about three inches in diameter with two bobbins of wire and two jet nozzles attached to the body. The three advisors quickly returned to the division TOC as Dobbins continued to direct air strikes. Before Kaplan, McClain, and Carter could return to the DIOC, two more guided missiles were fired from the high ground to the northeast in the vicinity of a Buddhist

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pagoda. All agreed that the introduction of this sophisticated equipment might signal the beginning of the long-awaited offensive. The time was 1031 hours. At that moment a large explosion rocked the DTOC sending people and equipment crashing about; then all was quiet except for the unceasing artillery fire which continued to shake the earth above.

(U) The division TOC was a 45 by 30 foot reinforced bunker constructed of beams and pierced steel planking with a double layer of sandbags and was buried about eight feet underground. The impact of the blast had tossed everyone about like matchsticks and blown out several walls. The DTOC communications room and equipment and the sleeping area of the division TOC officers had been destroyed. As LTC McClain pulled himself to his feet, a ringing sensation caused by the blast continued. He soon realized that COL Kaplan and MAJ Wise had serious head wounds. No other Americans appeared injured, but there were about 20 ARVN dead and seriously wounded on the debris-strewn floor of the damaged DTOC. 1LT John Jones, an operations officer, and CPT David Stewart, division signal advisor, began to tendage Wise and Kaplan, while McClain treated the wounded ARVN. While the wounded were being cared for, COL Kaplan noticed that smoke had begun to fill the DTOC. The creosoted timbers which reinforced the bunker in the communications room had been ignited by the blast and had started to burn furiously. There were no fire extinguishers present, and after several futile attempts to douse the flames with water, the bunker was evacuated. COL Kaplan and LTC McClain insured that everyone was removed from the bunker before they departed.²²

(C) Meanwhile, Stewart and MAJ Julius Warmath started to set up a new division TOC in the 42d Regiment TOC using US signal equipment. The division slowly regained a part of its composure, but a seed of doubt had been planted in the mind of their leader, COL Dat. The wire guided missile had devastated more than the command bunker; it had shattered the 22d Division's confidence in itself. A feeling that the NVA were better soldiers and must win had seemed to take hold on nearly every responsible individual. By noon the enemy had taken a heavy toll of the ARVN forces through the use of the wire guided missile. The five M-41 tanks within the compound were all destroyed by the missiles. Several bunkers were hit in addition to the division TOC. But the most important destruction had been psychological. At 1100 hours Vann, despite heavy enemy artillery fire, landed at Tan Canh to inquire about the decaying situation. He noticed that there was no ARVN counterbattery fire and that the MEDEVAC of wounded ARVN soldiers was entirely an American effort. After dis-

cussing the situation with the advisors, Vann directed them to implement their plan for escape and evasion. He then departed, taking with him several Vietnamese civilians who were employed by the advisors.²³

(U) LTC McClain and MAJ Warmath worked constantly during the afternoon to insure that all of the wounded were evacuated. In addition to directing the helicopters through increasing artillery fire, the advisory team also carried the litter patients to the aircraft. The remainder of the advisors were engaged in the direction of TACAIR onto enemy targets near the compound. With the exception of the increased artillery fire and small ground probes the remainder of the afternoon and early evening passed without significant incidents. The enemy did not move until 1900 hours when they lined up ten B-40 and B-41 rocket launchers on the high ground near the L-19 airstrip. Aided by the heavy barrage of artillery which kept the ARVN forces under cover, they were able to lob rounds of B-40 into the ammunition dump. One of several direct hits ignited a large fire which set off a chain of explosions and destroyed the stored ammunition. At 2100 hours CPT Richard Cassidy, the District Advisor of Dak To District, received word from his counterpart that tanks were moving through the hamlet of Dak Brung toward Dak To District Headquarters. Cassidy relayed this report to the 22d Division TOC and requested that a Spectre C-130 gunship be made available to counter this threat.²⁴

(C) At 2300 hours Spectre arrived in the Tan Canh area and immediately began to scan the Dak Brung hamlet area with its infrared and television tracking mechanisms. After 15 minutes the gunship located a column of 18 tanks moving from west to east toward Dak To District Headquarters. The Spectre reported this discovery to the 22d Division advisors and began to engage the tanks with the airborne 105mm cannon. Within Tan Canh this discovery caused a flurry of activity. LTC Thong, commander of the 42d Regiment, sent his deputy to the water tower on the northwest side of the perimeter to direct airstrikes onto the approaching enemy. CPT Ken Yonan, Deputy Senior Advisor, 42d Regiment, accompanied him to the tower and prepared to direct Spectre onto the tanks if they turned toward Tan Canh. Because a major attack appeared to be developing and ARVN was not attempting any countermeasures, COL Kaplan called his advisory team together and insured that they knew the escape and evasion plan. He then placed the advisors in bunkers to await the outcome of the initial engagements.²⁵

(U) Meanwhile, the Spectre had reported three tank kills around Dak Brung hamlet. Local terri-

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torial forces captured one of these tanks and found no visible damage. When a group of NVA sappers came down the road, the territorials fled, and the enemy drove the tank away. Evidently, Spectre's 106mm cannon was having little success in destroying the enemy tanks. Since the vehicles were T-54s (or Chinese Communist T-57s), the only vulnerable points to attack from high altitude with high explosive ammunition were the rear fuel tanks and rear engine compartment. A hit anywhere else caused casualties among the crew but did not usually disable the vehicle.²⁵

(U) About midnight the enemy armor column turned south toward Tan Canh and the 22d Division. COL Kaplan advised the ARVN artillery commander to get his people to fire on the tanks before they were overrun. His pleas were answered with a four gun volley which Spectre observed to hit one POL vehicle and land within five feet of one of the advancing T-54s. Kaplan applauded the Vietnamese for their efforts, but an intense counterbarrage of enemy artillery sent the ARVN artillerymen scurrying for their bunkers and ended the attempt to engage the oncoming enemy with indirect fire.²⁶

(U) To reach the 22d Division compound, the enemy column had to cross two bridges. Both bridges were defended by a platoon of territorial forces. Because they had no antitank capability, these local troops evacuated their bridge positions when faced with the advancing armor. This incident demonstrated a lack of coordination between the regular and territorial forces. Both bridges were along likely avenues of approach and spanned unfordable streams. The 22d ARVN Division Headquarters, however, believed that the sector forces had prepared the bridges for destruction; this was not the case, and the failure was not realized until it was too late. The tanks continued into the outskirts of Tan Canh Village. Some of them stopped there while others drove back towards Dak To. Spectre requested permission to fire on the tanks which had entered Tan Canh, but was refused because of the ARVN dependants in the village.

(U) Dobbins persuaded LTC Thong to deploy one company of the 42d in tank hunter/killer teams to seek out the enemy armor. Their efforts were rewarded with reports of two kills by these teams on the western edge of town. At 0326 hours on 24 April Spectre reported ten of the tanks had split off from Tan Canh and traveled to the high ground north of the compound near the L-19 strip. The remaining vehicles were proceeding south of Tan Canh Village and then west toward the compound. Spectre returned to Pleiku to refuel and rearmed and was replaced by another Spectre gunship armed with two 20mm cannons and two 40mm cannons incapable of destroying a T-54. However,

from his vantage point in the water tower CPT Yonan was able to place Spectre's fire onto troop concentrations which were moving closer to the compound.

(U) Dobbins had been on the east side of the perimeter near the main gate with LTC Thong since the first reports of the enemy armor were received. Shortly before 0600 hours the tanks began their attack through the early morning haze. As they assaulted they raked the front line bunkers of the perimeter near the main gate with machine gun fire. Simultaneously, the tanks which had moved to the high ground near the L-19 airstrip supported by fire an infantry assault on the northern perimeter, while a second infantry assault hit the southern perimeter which was defended by the reconnaissance company of the 42d Regiment. Dobbins informed the TOC of the advance of the armor and of a mass exodus of ARVN soldiers through the perimeter. The sight and sound of the advancing enemy armor had proved too much for the 900 undisciplined and unorganized support troops within the compound, and they fled in fear. The tanks crossed the bridge and moved on line toward the main gate. Dobbins and LTC Thong remained in positions near the gate in an attempt to build up the confidence of the combat troops there who had seen the support troops break and flee in terror.

(U) After he received the report that the support troops had fled, COL Kaplan diagnosed the situation as critical. He alerted the division advisors to prepare for extraction if the ARVN did not hold. Five minutes later Dobbins reported that the advancing tanks were at the main gate and that the ARVN was unable to stop them. His transmission was cut out by three 106mm shells which struck the TOC and knocked down the antennas. At this report the division advisors recognized that they were in no position to continue to influence the action by their presence. They left the TOC, secured their weapons, radio, and two LAWs and went into the compound, proceeding to the water tower. CPT Yonan was still perched there in the hope of thwarting the attack if TACAIR arrived. Unfortunately, the morning haze rendered high performance aircraft ineffective and helicopter gunships were still 30 minutes away. CPT Stewart, who was carrying a PRC-25, radioed Yonan and told him to come down out of the tower and move with them to the west where they would be extracted. Yonan said he could not move at that time, but would join them later. His reply was silenced by the sound of two rounds of T-54 main gun shells as they exploded on the water tower. Another quick call by Stewart to Yonan to evacuate the tower received the reply that he was uninjured but could not leave at that time.²⁷

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(C) Dodging artillery, the advisors ran to the western perimeter. There they saw a burning T-54 tank barreling down the road from the north just outside the wire. The tank was past their position before they could engage with their LAWs. However, as a second tank came into view LTC McClain and LT Jones prepared their weapons for engagement but were frustrated by two malfunctions as the second T-54 moved quickly past. Fortunately there was no infantry in support of the two tanks. Seizing this opportunity to escape entrapment, the advisors moved quickly across the road. Ahead of them lay 200 meters of friendly minefield. A wounded ARVN soldier lay nearby. While being given first aid, the soldier told the advisors he knew the way through the minefield. He led them across the field to the other side of the clearing. Here they took up positions and pondered their next move.²³

(C) Mr. Vann had been awake most of the previous night as reports filtered into the II Corps headquarters in Pleiku. At first light on 24 April he and his pilot, CPT Richard Todd, were in the air heading for Tan Canh. He had had no communication with the advisors since the enemy armor had assaulted the compound. Arriving over Tan Canh, Vann was able to establish communication with Stewart on the ground. Vann viewed the situa-

tion and asked how best he could pick up the advisors. COL Kaplan replied that they would move 200 more meters to the west, away from small arms fire. While six men moved, the remaining three covered them. These three then joined the first group. Finally it was decided that Vann could come in in his OH-55 helicopter and extract the first group of advisors. In this group were MAJ Carter, MAJ Warmath, CPT Keller, LT Jones, SGT Ward, and SP Zollenkopher. As Vann left with the first group several frightened ARVN soldiers hung onto the skids of the helicopter. Fearing that the dangling Vietnamese would fall before he could reach Ben Het, Vann set down at Dak To II, where LTC Robert Brownlee and CPT Charles Carden, advisors to the 47th Regiment, awaited them. Vann then headed back for Tan Canh and the remaining advisors. As he landed, the aircraft was swamped by 15 to 20 panic-stricken ARVN soldiers. While attempting to lift off, the helicopter crashed, but Vann and CPT Todd escaped. They were picked up shortly by another aircraft which then located the three remaining advisors, Kaplan, McClain and Stewart. Panicky ARVN troops again tried unsuccessfully to crowd aboard, but the aircraft lifted off without them. Thirty minutes later the party landed at Pleiku.

THE ATTACK ON DAK TO II

(U) Meanwhile, Dak To II came under increasing fire and some ground probes less than an hour after the attack on Tan Canh had begun. The helicopter originally scheduled to be used for the command and control helicopter of the 22d Division was diverted to Dak To II where it was to evacuate the six 22d Division advisors. CPT Carden had noted the NVA antiaircraft weapons on his map and he briefed the aircraft pilot over the radio. The aircraft made its approach from the southwest and weaved its way to the compound helipad where the six passengers awaited. The helicopter took some small arms fire from the dense undergrowth around the perimeter but landed and then lifted off without damage. However, contrary to instructions, the pilot exited to the northwest and flew into a crossfire of two antiaircraft guns. The helicopter burst into flames and crashed on the southern side of the perimeter. Carden concluded that there were no survivors.²⁴

(U) Back in the 42d Regiment's compound Dobbins had chosen to remain until the bitter end. He and LTC Thong were feverishly working to reconstitute the defenses of the shattered troops of the 42d. By 0630 hours the enemy had pierced the northeast perimeter with their armor, closely followed by the infantry. After initially repelling

an enemy infantry battalion on the southern perimeter, the outnumbered reconnaissance company had been overrun by weight of numbers, although more than 100 enemy had been killed. The northwestern perimeter was penetrated by a battalion infantry assault and then exploited by a platoon of T-54s.

(U) The enemy artillery continued to fire throughout the attack. When the weather finally cleared enough for high performance aircraft, Dobbins relayed targets to the forward air controllers who then marked them with smoke. The tanks stopped and did not attempt evasive action; they served as decoys for the antiaircraft gunners. When the NVA 37mm antiaircraft guns fired, however, they were targeted by the forward air controllers. Dobbins and Thong continually moved from bunker to bunker, biding in culverts and whatever else would lend them cover. At 1000 hours LTC Thong lost all contact with his elements, and both men decided there was nothing else they could do to influence the situation. Dobbins' recent attempts to contact Yonan had been fruitless. It appeared unlikely that Yonan was still alive in view of the pounding that side of the compound had taken. (Editor's Note: CPT Yonan's name was included on the POW list released by Hanoi in late January 1973.) LTC Thong directed Dobbins to follow him

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as he led the way to his quarters within the inner perimeter. They were followed by about 19 ARVN soldiers. Arriving at the hut, Thong opened a trap door revealing a hidden bunker. Climbing inside they closed the door and settled into the darkness as the fighting overhead slowly dwindled to a few isolated pockets of resistance.³⁰

(U) After reporting the crash of the UH-1 at Dak To II, CPT Carden and LTC Brownlee tried vainly to find their counterparts and the 47th command group. The regimental TOC was deserted, and it appeared that the command group had already decided it was time to exit the danger area. While looking for someone in command, Carden viewed the arrival of two T-54 tanks on the airstrip. One T-54 proceeded to the west end of the airfield along the north road to cover the highway leading into Dak To II from Ben Het where COL Dat had erroneously positioned the bulk of his armor. The other T-54 wheeled into the center of the airfield from the north and systematically attacked the bunker defenses of the 47th Regiment's command post. The two remaining operational M-41 tanks maneuvered to the west flank of the T-54 and took it under fire with three rounds each. Carden was only 100 meters from the NVA tank and observed direct hits and smoke, but the enemy tank was not knocked out. The T-54 recovered quickly and destroyed one M-41 with a second round hit, and immediately thereafter the enemy tank destroyed the other M-41 with one round. The wounded crew members abandoned their burning tanks.

(U) At this time a relief column of two platoons of M-41s plus a platoon of infantry left Ben Het to counterattack the NVA forces around Dak To II. They crossed the Dak Mot bridge and were ambushed by a large NVA force holding the high ground just east of the bridge. Enemy B-40 and recoilless rifle fire destroyed all of the M-41s and scattered the infantry.³¹

(U) This was the last ARVN counterattack on the 24th. After the tank battle, Carden located LTC Brownlee. Both men decided the compound was in imminent danger of being overrun in the absence of control of the 47th Regiment and the 9th Airborne Battalion, also located in the compound. At about 1000 hours Carden witnessed friendly forces moving toward the south. The departure of the airborne troops, extraction of the US advisors, and the desertion of their command group were the final blows in shattering the confidence of the 47th Regiment. With no one to control them they began to leave their positions and head out of the compound. Brownlee and Carden realized that they could no longer influence the situation and that no further fighting was going to occur that day. They gathered together their radios and supplies,

burned some documents, and moved out of the base camp toward the southeast. The two advisors and their Vietnamese interpreter and driver attempted to cross a small footbridge over the Dak Peko River which flows along the southern boundary of the compound. However, the airborne battalion and elements of the 47th Regiment who had followed them were pinned down by a large volume of fire. The river was clogged with the bodies of the dead and wounded who had been chopped down while attempting to cross the footbridge. Realizing it was impossible to cross the river at that location, Brownlee and Carden moved westward along the riverbank until they reached a likely fording spot about 700 meters up the river from the bridge. As they attempted to ford the river they came under an intense volume of both direct and indirect fire. When the group finally crossed the river and were climbing up the steep bank on the other side, Carden noticed LTC Brownlee having trouble climbing the bank. At that moment the volume of fire increased again. Carden was forced to abandon his position on top of the river bank and hurry into the dense underbrush about 100 meters away. When the firing slackened off several minutes later, Carden moved cautiously back to the riverbank in an attempt to locate LTC Brownlee. He moved several hundred meters up and down the stream in his search but was unable to locate Brownlee. LTC Brownlee was not heard from again. Carden and the two Vietnamese began to head south toward Fire Support Base Vida where they were picked up two days later.

(C) Day long US TACAIR strikes on the enemy around Tan Canh had shaken the bunker where Dobbins and the 20 ARVN had hidden. At 2000 hours, Dobbins divided the South Vietnamese up into three-man groups and prepared to escape. The moon was full and they were detected as they neared the southwest side of the perimeter. Four men were killed before the group finally found concealment in a pigpen on the eastern bunker line. At midnight the group again attempted to escape. This time they were caught in the illumination of a flare by Spectre which was firing on targets in the area. Once again they were detected, losing several more men to small arms fire. They returned to the pigpen and waited until about 0430 hours when the moon finally set for the night. A low ground fog also covered their moves as they successfully passed through the perimeter on this try. They proceeded south several kilometers and were spotted and picked up the next day.³²

(C) The attacking enemy units at Tan Canh and Dak To II were part of the 2d NVA Division. Battalions of the 1st and 141st NVA Regiment formed the infantry assault along with the D-10

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Two Communist tanks were destroyed in the middle of the runway at Dak To Airfield April 24 by fighter-bombers of the Republic of Vietnam Air Force. The airfield is adjacent to Route 512, three miles south of Dak To.

Sapper Battalion. The T-54 tanks which supported the assaults were from one battalion of the enemy 203d Tank Regiment. The attack was well-coordinated in spite of several miscues in timing, and the use of conventional tactics by the enemy was not new in the Indochina War. What was significant, however, was the heavy commitment of front line NVA troops in an all-out effort. During prior offensives such as Tet of 1968, VC units had led the attacks, but the attack on Tan Canh was primarily an NVA effort. During the 24th and 25th of

April the North Vietnamese consolidated their gains and extended their control west of the Dak To II airstrip and south to Dien Binh. Captured ARVN equipment included twenty-three 105mm howitzers, seven 155mm howitzers, 14,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, and other materiel. Among the missing were COL Dat and his entire staff.³³

(C) The 320th NVA Division continued to pressure the remaining fire support bases on Rocket Ridge during the attacks on Tan Canh and Dak To II (See Fig. K-2). On 25 April the decision

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was made by LTC Luu to abandon the precarious positions at Fire Support Bases 5 and 8, affording the NVA covered movement down Route 14 to Kontum City. In addition, the enemy could now force ARVN to abandon its defensive positions along the route by bringing a heavy volume of fire to bear on them. At the same time as the enemy thrust in Kontum Province, the 3d NVA Division and VC main force units attacked the three northernmost districts in Binh Dinh Province. Although the 40th and 41st Regiments of the 22d ARVN Division had been quite successful in recent combat with VC units, the NVA regulars forced them

to break and run from Landing Zone (LZ) English and other fire bases in the area. This focused allied attention on the threat to Kontum City, as the NVA came within reach of their goal of cutting South Vietnam in two. The Vietnamese Joint General Staff and the US Command began to give more credence to John Paul Vann's contention that the enemy campaigns at Quang Tri and An Loc were limited in scope and that the NVA's real goal was to take Kontum, Pleiku, and Binh Dinh Provinces by multidivision attacks across the highlands.

(U) To combat the successes of the NVA offensive the II Corps staff activated the following plan. COL Ba, 23d Division commander, would command all forces in Kontum Province. Four battalions of rangers would occupy blocking positions at Vo Dinh and south along the Dak Peko River. The 53d ARVN Regiment was given the responsibility for Kontum City. The 22d Ranger Battalion moved to Poiu Kleng to reinforce the battalion of border rangers there. In addition, Vann placed B-52 strikes along Rocket Ridge and over the evacuated fire support bases. Thousands of refugees, remnants of the 22d Division, and missing US advisors in enemy held areas limited the number of airstrikes. To alleviate this problem TACAIR was utilized with over 180 sorties flown during the period 24 to 26 April.

(C) By 28 April much of the 23d Division staff was enroute to Kontum City. COL Ba was faced with the difficult task of melding a conglomeration of units into a cohesive defense. The only 23d Division unit remaining under his command was the 33d Regiment. The 2d and 6th Ranger Groups, an airborne brigade, and sector forces under COL Long comprised the remaining forces under COL Ba's command (each of these other unit commanders reported through nine different chains of command). Several of these full colonels resented taking orders from another colonel, and as a result COL Ba had an increasingly difficult time attempting to get them to respond to his orders. Many times they would not show up for coordination meetings, making it impossible to adequately plan for the defense. To solve the problem Varn suggested to LTG Dzu that his deputy, MG Phong, and Vann's deputy, BG John Hill, fly to Kontum each morning at 0800 hours to preside over the staff meetings. Their presence insured the attendance of the unit commanders and permitted the defense to be planned. COL John Truby, the acting Senior Advisor to the 23d Division, was given the moru-

mental task of advising the division staff on the concepts of a conventional defense within a limited time. The 23d Division advisors also had to explain details such as limiting points, coordination of units on the perimeter, reduction of penetrations, and so forth.

(C) To insure the division maximum time to train and prepare for the defense, COL Ba assigned the 2d and 6th Ranger Groups to the critical mission of delaying along Route 14 between Tan Canh and Kontum. The defensive plan established an outer defensive line seven kilometers from the center of the city with a delaying position four kilometers in front of the final defensive positions on the edge of the city. Four 155mm howitzers and forty-four 105mm howitzers were available for fire support. The northern and western approaches were defended by rangers, while the 53d Regiment defended the east and south.

(C) On 26 April LTG Dzu was ordered to Saigon to see President Thieu. When he returned to Pleiku he brought word that he had a heart ailment which would cause him to be committed to a hospital in Saigon. Dzu appeared to be shaken by his visit to Saigon and did not wish to discuss it with anyone. Dzu eventually left for the hospital in Saigon on 10 May and was replaced by MG Toan.³⁴

(U) The 6th Ranger Group arrived in Military Region 2 on 24 April from the Hue battlefield where it had been heavily engaged. MAJ James Givens, Senior Advisor to the 6th Ranger Group, had listened to the fall of Tan Canh on the radio as the group moved into position at Fire Support Base Bravo. This base was just north of the Dinh where the group was colocated with the 2d Airborne Brigade Command Post (See Fig. K-2). The next day the airborne brigade was ordered to Kontum to board transportation for Saigon and the 6th Group moved nearer Kontum to Fire Support Base November. From Lam Son, a long, high piece of key terrain with a commanding view of

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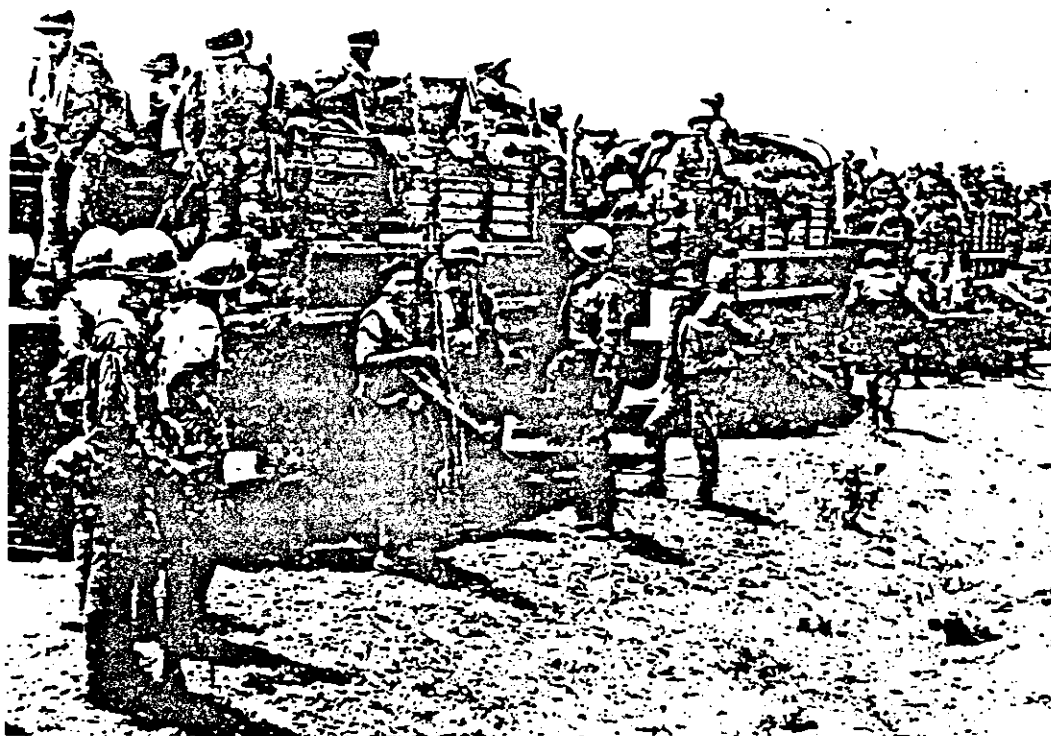
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Highway 14 north of Ve Dinh and south toward Kontum, Givens and his assistant, CPT Vannie, observed the remnants of the 22d Division struggle past their position in groups of from 5 to 15 people with very few small arms and no crew-served weapons; many of the troops had no steel helmets or web gear. They had discarded these items in their haste to flee the attacking NVA forces. Although unorganized, there was no panic among the stragglers, who gave the appearance of Sunday strollers.

(U) Throughout the 25th and 26th increasing attacks-by-fire hit the group command post. The group had not received heavy casualties, but at 1500 hours on the 27th Givens and Vannie, along with the ranger group command post, were airlifted to Fire Support Base November over the objections of Givens that the command post should remain with the major elements of the group at Lam Son. The remaining ranger battalions, the 34th and 35th, continued to receive ground probes and attacks-by-fire. At 0500 hours on 1 May the

crews of four M-41 tanks at Lam Son abandoned their vehicles in the face of an NVA attack. The NVA then occupied the tanks, which VNAF TAC-AIR and a USAF Stinger gunship successfully destroyed, and the attack was repulsed.

(U) At 1800 hours the 23d Division Combat Advisory Team contacted Givens and informed him that the airborne artillery battery had departed Lam Son. Givens hurried to confirm this with the group commander, LTC De, but was told that the group headquarters had no contact with its two battalions at Lam Son. At 1930 hours contact was reestablished with the withdrawing ranger units. They were moving well to the south of Lam Son, carrying 50 wounded and their crew-served weapons with them. Asking why the artillery had abandoned the fire support base, Givens discovered that LTC De had ordered his two infantry battalions to withdraw; thus, the artillery was left without local security and forced to leave. On 4 May LTG Dau relieved LTC De for failing to hold Fire Support Base November.²³



Ranger groups leaving Kontum after being replaced by the 44th and 45th ARVN Regiments.

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(C) This matter convinced Mr. Vann to persuade LTG Dru that the remaining organic units of the 23d Division, the 44th and 45th Regiments, should be brought to Kontum to replace the two ranger groups and the airborne brigade with no resultant loss in manpower. Dru accepted this proposal. On 6 May the 45th Regiment moved up Route 14 from Pleiku and was exchanged for the 6th Ranger Group.²⁵

(C) From 24 April to 5 May attacks-by-fire on the ranger camps which were astride the NVA supply routes increased. Ben Het and Poi Kleng bore the brunt of these sporadic attacks because they hindered the enemy's movement of supplies into his assembly areas for the attack on Kontum City. On 6 May at 1200 hours Poi Kleng received heavy artillery fire. Over 60 rounds fell in an hour and a half before US air strikes temporarily stopped the enemy fire. When the forward air controllers left station at 1515 hours, however, the volume of fire once again increased until 500 rounds had fallen by 1900 hours that day. The systematic destruction of each bunker within the compound indicated that the fire was being adjusted. The command bunker, where advisors CPT Gaddes McLaren and LT Paul McKenna were directing US air support, was struck by several direct hits. At 1730 hours a round collapsed the walls and blew out an oak door. The two advisors dug their way out of the rubble and moved to open foxholes nearer the perimeter. The enemy forward observers then systematically destroyed all the buildings above ground, all of the bunkers, and knocked down the antennas. The repeated accurate shelling demoralized the ARVN ranger defenders. When McKenna attempted to find the battalion commander at 1800 hours, he found that the commander had fled from the compound. On his return to the limited cover of his foxhole, he observed the enemy using flashing red beacons to signal their infantry who were poised for the

attack. At 1900 hours, despite the heavy antiaircraft fire an OH-6 landed to extract the advisors. The camp continued to hold on for three more days through continuous indirect fire and ground attacks by the 64th NVA Regiment. The enemy's massing of forces to seize Poi Kleng provided lucrative targets for the sixteen US B-52 strikes employed in the area during the three days of extended attack. A Hot Chanh later attested to the effectiveness of B-52 strikes against the forces attacking Poi Kleng. He reported that his company of 100 men had sustained 40 killed and many more wounded. At 0500 hours on 9 May, however, the ARVN forces were wedged out of Poi Kleng by an assault of NVA tanks and infantry. LTG Dru then directed anything within the evacuated perimeter to be taken under fire.

(C) During this period Ben Het Ranger Camp received a total of 400 to 500 rounds of mixed caliber indirect fire. On 7 May the 71st Ranger Battalion mutinied and gave the battalion commander an ultimatum to extract the unit within 48 hours. Before the extraction was completed the camp was ringed by antiaircraft weapons.²⁷

(U) At dawn on the 9th of May the North Vietnamese sent dogs into the perimeter wire to detonate mechanical mines. This tactic was followed at 0630 hours by a heavy ground attack supported by six PT-76 tanks. Two of the tanks, supported by infantry, assaulted the main gate but were knocked out by rangers using LAWs. At 0730 hours five PT-76 tanks attacked the eastern perimeter; two were knocked out by LAWs. The remainder retired after NVA infantry had seized the eastern perimeter. The rangers spent the rest of the day ejecting the enemy. By 1700 hours the perimeter was restored. The attacking NVA forces lost 11 tanks and over 100 dead in their attempt to overrun Ben Het. Although the forces there continued to be harassed, no more major assaults were made.

THE FIRST ATTACK ON KONTUM

(U) The air cavalry had not been idle during the period since Tan Canh. Daily missions over the battle area detected new trails, caches, and bunker complexes. The regional advisory group began using a regional command and control helicopter in which senior officers flew as observers and went where they could best influence the action. On 10 May BG John Hill stopped in Kontum to confer with COL John Truby about a sighting he had made just north of Vo Dinh. Hill was convinced that the area was a main assembly area for attacking forces. A prisoner captured that same day confirmed that the 320th NVA Division had closed on its assembly area. Subsequently, B-52 strikes

were placed on the suspected positions.

(U) The 23d Division had continued its preparation for the defense of Kontum. COL Ba personally walked the entire perimeter. He criticized poor positions and talked encouragingly to his troops. Several tank hulls were pulled into open areas for targets and as many soldiers as possible were given the opportunity to fire the LAW in conjunction with a companion program which showed victorious ARVN soldiers beside T-54 tanks they had destroyed at An Loc and Quang Tri. The purpose was to instill in ARVN soldiers the confidence that they could destroy an attacking tank.

(U) Commanders coordinated at their limiting

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points and supervised the improvement of camouflage. Reserve forces practiced counterattacking possible penetrations. The division artillery planned fires around the perimeter. Sector forces were trained in calling for fire to show them that the division was going to give them all possible fire support. COL Ba ordered limited offensive operations which fixed the enemy and developed targets for the B-52 missions allocated to Military Region 2.

(U) On 12 May the 44th Regiment completed its replacement of the 2d Ranger Group astride Route 14, the probable main avenue of approach. The 44th Regiment's positions were approximately four kilometers northwest of Kontum. The ARVN soldiers were confident and believed that they could knock out NVA tanks with their organic weapons. COL Ba was more confident now that the 23d's own units were organized into the defense. At 0700 hours on 13 May, radio intercepts confirmed that the 320th NVA Division was in its final stage of preparation in its assembly area, confirming air cavalry reports of a large buildup of armor and troops just south of Vo Dinh.²⁵

(C) The enemy planned to attack as early as possible because they felt that US B-52s would hurt them if they remained long in their attack positions. Vann was skeptical about an imminent attack since no concentrated artillery preparations were falling on the 23d's defensive positions. Although there were scattered attacks-by-fire, the pattern of heavy bombardment before the attacks on Tan Canh and the fire support bases was absent. At 2230 hours a battalion of the 44th Regiment at Fire Support Base November reported many lights moving south on Highway 14 toward their positions. This report did not cause alarm until it was realized that NVA inexperience with night movement of armor vehicles had caused them to use their lights when moving into attack positions at Tan Canh. Shortly afterward COL Ba entered with a captured document which had been sent from the 320th Division artillery commander to one of his units. The message stated that all supporting artillery would support an attack by the 320th at 0400 hours on 14 May. COL Truby again talked to Vann and the Corps G-3. Although both still considered this contention hasty, Vann believed it was better to be prepared and told Truby he would get air assets to them at first light. At 0400 hours nothing happened. The 23d Division G-2, LTC Tieu, then brought in another captured document which delayed the attack one-half hour. The G-2 believed that since these orders were coming from B-3 Front Headquarters the times were probably Hanoi time — one hour later than Saigon time. At 0430 hours Fire Support Base November began to receive an increasing volume of indirect fire which continued

until 0630 hours, when the attack began.²⁶

(C) The NVA had been surprised at the ease with which they had taken Tan Canh. As a result they decided to attack Kontum City without a time-consuming artillery preparation. The attack had three major axes of advance (See Fig. K-3) oriented along Highway 14 from the north and northwest. The 48th NVA Regiment and one company of the 203d Tank Regiment attacked from the northwest along the west side of Route 14. The 64th NVA Regiment attacked south along the east side of the highway also with one company of supporting armor from the 203d Tank Regiment. The 28th NVA Regiment of the enemy B-3 Front advanced from the north against the 53d ARVN Regiment. The 141st Regiment of the 2d NVA Division probed the sector forces who defended the southern positions along the river.²⁷

(U) The air support was not yet on station when the call came into the DTOC that two columns of infantry with tanks were coming down Route 14. A quick call by COL Truby to the corps operations center launched US Cobras and the new weapon in the corps arsenal, the helicopter mounted TOW missile. The ARVN artillery commander quickly massed his artillery on the high speed avenue of approach, Route 14, and the 44th dispatched several tank killer teams armed with the LAW. The massed artillery made the T-34s easy prey for the tank killer teams by separating the attacking infantry from the tanks. LTC Thomas McKenna, Senior Advisor to the 44th Regiment, reported that ARVN soldiers, while admitting they were initially scared by the iron monsters, crawled out of their bunkers and engaged the tanks with their LAWs at point blank range. Two quick kills were made by the teams. Meanwhile, the helicopters with TOW missiles had arrived over Kontum. Before two of the tanks could reach the cover of the thick undergrowth along the highway, the TOW missiles stopped them dead in their tracks. The heavy artillery concentration and sudden destruction of the leading armor broke up the initial attack by 0900 hours, although indirect fire and small probes continued. In addition, the sky was filled with both US and VNAF aircraft attacking enemy targets vigorously.

(U) All of Kontum City received incoming artillery and rocket fire, but the air support was successful in spotting its origin and silencing the guns and launchers. Some areas, however, such as the airfield and the division CP received light attacks-by-fire, indicating that the enemy forward observers were adjusting their rounds for future fires. By nightfall on the 14th the front lines had been restored by the 23d Division through fierce, hand-to-hand fighting.

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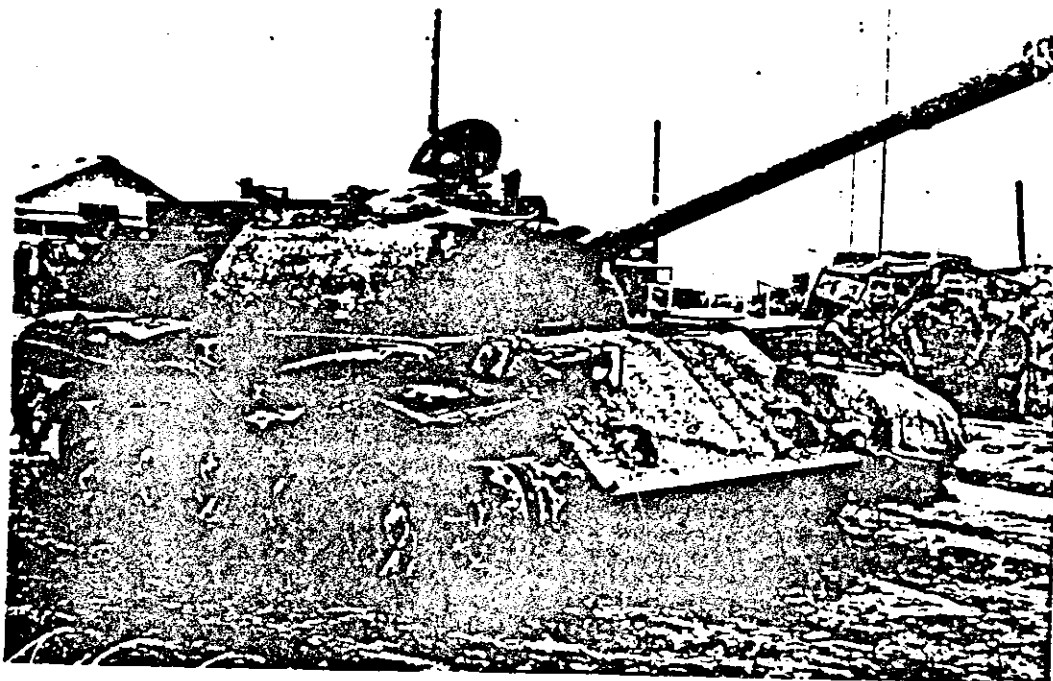
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(U) At 2000 hours the enemy again launched attacks against the 44th and 53d Regiments. The renewed attacks were more intense than the previous ones. In the confusion of fighting at night the two ARVN regiments failed to coordinate and interlock their fires. This situation spelled disaster when a battalion of the NVA penetrated the gap between the ARVN regiments.

(U) MAJ Wade Lovings, Deputy Senior Advisor, 44th ARVN Regiment, reported to the division advisors that the ARVN regimental commander was requesting timed, preplanned artillery fires on their locations. Lovings also requested that when the Spectre came on station he be allowed to work him on the perimeter of the 44th. By this time Lovings and LTC McKenna felt they were faced with three battalions of attacking NVA who were situated in their front, eastern flank, and rear. The Spectre arrived and Lovings immediately put his fires all around the perimeter as targets were relayed from the front line units through the regimental commander.⁴¹

(C) At that same moment in the DTOC COL

Truby and the other members of the advisory team were developing some last-ditch defensive measures in order to stop the enemy penetrations. They wanted to place on the attacking enemy the two B-52 strikes scheduled for 0300 hours. The situation was turning more desperate by the minute. If the penetrations were not stopped Kontum would fall by dawn. Because it was impossible to request the B-52 strikes any nearer to friendly positions, COL Truby proposed that COL Ba withdraw his forces one hour before the strikes. An increase in artillery was planned to compensate for the withdrawn force. When the B-52s arrived, they would catch the NVA in the open with little cover. Ba was deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation and anxious to do whatever possible to improve it. Truby told Vann of the plan and requested his approval. Vann was hesitant due to the complex coordination involved. Finally, he acquiesced after thorough discussion with both Truby and Ba. During the three or four hours until the strikes all attention was focused on holding in place. The 53d Regiment committed their reserve to block the penetration



A T-54 tank destroyed 14 May

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