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**PROJECT**  
**C**ontemporary  
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**E**valuation of  
**C**ombat  
**O**perations  
**REPORT**

# THE DEFENSE OF SAIGON

14 DECEMBER 1968

HQ PACAF  
Directorate, Tactical Evaluation  
CHECO Division

Prepared by: MAJ. A. W. THOMPSON

Project CHECO 7th AF, DOAC

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## PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in the employment of USAF airpower to meet a multitude of requirements. The varied applications of airpower have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, there has been an accumulation of operational data and experiences that, as a priority, must be collected, documented, and analyzed as to current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity that would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction, and would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations, was established to meet this Air Staff requirement. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements at Hq 7AF and 7/13AF, Project CHECO provides a scholarly, "on-going" historical evaluation and documentation of USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in Southeast Asia combat operations. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and evaluation which is being accomplished. Along with the other CHECO publications, this is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in SEA.



MILTON B. ADAMS, Major General, USAF  
Chief of Staff

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FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Warren H. Peterson", is written over the typed name.

WARREN H. PETERSON, Colonel, USAF  
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FOREWORD

This report traces the 1968 Communist Winter-Spring campaign in the Saigon area. The three distinct phases of enemy attacks--the Tet Offensive, the rocket assaults beginning on 18 February, and the May Offensive--are examined in light of air response. Particular emphasis is placed on examining the resultant damage in the urban area plus the requirement for and the effectiveness of fixed wing aircraft in urban guerrilla warfare.

During the series of offensives on Saigon, command of U.S., FWMAF, and RVNAF forces was maintained by National Commanders. Combined operations involving the above forces were founded upon the principle of cooperation, coordination, mutual support, and close partnership at all echelons. The defense and security of Saigon was delegated by the Commanding General, III Corps, to the Commanding Officer of the Capital Military District (CMD), the area encompassing Saigon and its environs.<sup>1/</sup>

To accomplish his assigned missions, the Commanding Officer (CO) of the CMD had operational control of all RVNAF units except designated General Reserve units stationed or deployed into the CMD. At the onset of the enemy Spring Offensive, command relationships in the CMD were not designed to facilitate conducting a major combined defensive campaign in Gia Dinh and Saigon.<sup>2/</sup> The subsequent CMD reorganization and birth of the Capital Military Assistance Command (CMAC) will be discussed in a separate chapter.

All supporting fires, to include artillery, helicopter gunships, and tactical air in the CMD, were cleared first by the District Chief and, in

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Saigon, by the Precinct Chief and finally by the CO, CMD, through his Tactical Operations Center (TOC). Thus, both political and military clearances were required. These procedures were followed during the series of attacks on Saigon.<sup>3/</sup>

During the Tet Offensive, the enemy discovered his inability to defeat US/RVNAF forces in either rural or urban areas. His forces which reached Saigon were not trained for city fighting. Accordingly, they were destroyed with relatively minor damage to Saigon. With his February defeat, he changed both his objectives and tactics. By selecting urban areas with emphasis on Saigon for the May attacks, he made it much more difficult for allied forces to repulse him without severely damaging the battleground.<sup>4/</sup>

An enemy report captured in March 1968 provided information that there were three planned phases of the Saigon Offensive: phase one from 30 January to 20 February; phase two from 10 March to 10 April; phase three from 20 April until the end of May. Originally, the third phase was to begin between 4 and 9 March; however, the actual timing of the renewed offensive was, of course, dependent on resupply. This resupply, particularly in the city, was vigorously pursued. Weapons and explosives were brought into Saigon in three-wheeled vehicles and private cars. Quite often the weapons were hidden under articles of clothing and food, which the VC brought into the city under the guise of aiding victims of the Tet Offensive. An interesting sidelight to the pre-positioning of supplies was that, to insure against having their troops lost or misled while in the city, the VC sentenced to death the guides who were assigned the mission of leading units during the Tet attack.<sup>5/</sup> The CHECO study,

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"Air Response to the Tet Offensive", pointed out that a large portion of the problems the enemy encountered during Tet were attributable to missed rally points, late timing, and other hindrances due to poor guides.

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CHAPTER I

TET OFFENSIVE

In November 1967, it appeared that the enemy in III Corps had decided to employ the majority of his main force units along the Cambodian border and, in particular, to strengthen and consolidate his hold over Military Region 10 (Binh Long, Phuoc Long, and Quang Duc Provinces). While intelligence information indicated that the enemy was preparing for a major dry season effort, it seemed he would probably launch the attacks after using the Tet truce period to massively resupply and reinforce across South Vietnamese borders.<sup>1/</sup>

Force Posture

During late 1967, the planned II Field Force deployment posture stemmed from a COMUSMACV-directed strategy that had three basic features:<sup>2/</sup>

- First, the undertaking of several offensive operations in the border areas which would have committed 22 of the 53 II Field Force maneuver battalions available along the northern border.
- Second, the implementing of a border sealing Tet posture in which Battalion Task Forces would block main VC infiltration routes during the Tet truce.
- Third, the continuing, by mutual US/RVNAF agreement, of the shift of responsibility for the security of the area around Saigon and the allied bases from U.S. to Vietnamese forces.

Had II Field Force fully pursued the strategy, the bulk of its forces, 39 battalions, would have been deployed outside the allied base area and up to 150 kilometers from Saigon. At that distance, redeployment would have been largely by fixed wing aircraft and only 14 maneuver battalions would have been available for quick redeployment and reaction to threats.<sup>3/</sup>

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During December 1967 and January 1968, substantial evidence was received indicating VC intentions to attack the populated centers in III Corps. Battalion-sized units had attacked Tan Uyen, Buo Trni, and Trang Bang, while several main force regiments were detected moving toward Saigon. The VC had reequipped their forces with AK-47s and RPG-2s, plus NVA filler personnel were being put in local force battalions. Because of these actions, the Commander, II Field Force, with COMUSMACV's approval, repositioned most of his forces within striking distance of Saigon. Of a total of 53 maneuver battalions at his disposal, 27 were within assault helicopter range of all the vital areas while only 26 battalions remained in the peripheral areas.

During this same period, there were no major shifts in ARVN forces. Men absent from their units for the Tet truce had lowered ARVN strength on 20 January to about 50 percent of their authorized manning. Although the Tet truce was cancelled at 0945 on 30 January, the inadequate Vietnamese communications system precluded the effective notification of the bulk of these soldiers. Therefore, the strength of the 46 ARVN battalions was still at about 50 percent when the VC attacks were launched.<sup>4/</sup>

Of the 54 main and local force VC/NVA battalions in III Corps, 35 were committed to the initial assault. Their overall strategy was to launch simultaneous attacks on the government buildings in Saigon and on key U.S. and ARVN military installations with the objective of gathering support from the population and presenting the U.S. with an untenable situation when the government collapsed.<sup>5/</sup> Figure 1 depicts the estimated combat effective VC/NVA maneuver battalions in III Corps on 29 January and their subsequent decline by early

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March.

Enemy local force units were to launch the initial attacks against Saigon, while main force units blocked reinforcements and prepared to exploit successes of the local forces. Of the eleven battalions, at a combined strength of 3,000-4,000, initially committed to the attack on Saigon, seven were units whose home grounds were already in and around the CMD. Consequently, they did not have long distances to infiltrate. The 5th VC/NVA Division was to hold U.S. forces in the peripheral area as long as possible to block reinforcements, but the VC failed to prevent reinforcements either overland or by air. By midnight of the 31st, the U.S. and ARVN had brought more maneuver battalions into the CMD than the VC had in their initial assault. The 9th VC Division was to interdict the road network and bolster local forces.<sup>6/</sup>

The NVA units moved in close to Saigon through forced marches, some as long as 12 continuous hours on the last night. Arms had been smuggled in by produce-carrying vehicles over Highway 13. These weapons were cached in pre-positioned areas throughout the city.<sup>7/</sup>

The Assault

The Tet Offensive in Saigon began at 0300 hours, 31 January 1968, with a rocket and mortar attack followed by a three-battalion ground assault on U.S. Army Headquarters at Long Binh, located just to the east of Saigon. The VC attack never reached the coordinated assault stage at Long Binh as it was broken by gunships, artillery, and heavy small arms fire from converging U.S. Army companies.<sup>8/</sup>

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The C-10 Sapper Battalion attacked the U.S. Embassy at 0530 with a 19-man force, all of whom were killed. Other members of the unit assaulted the GVN Presidential Palace, the Saigon radio station, JGS (Joint General Staff) Headquarters, and a number of police stations and billets. At the same time, the VC 267th and 269th Main Force Battalions attacked Tan Son Nhut from the north and west while the 2d and 6th Local Force Battalions entered Cho Lon from the west. Heavy fighting ensued in these areas as U.S. and ARVN units organized reaction forces. As daylight arrived on 31 January, heavy gunfire was heard throughout the city as helicopter gunships, and VNAF and U.S. tactical fighters conducted strikes against enemy strong points.<sup>9/</sup>

On 1 February, the An Quang Pagoda became the focus of heavy fighting when an ARVN unit discovered a VC headquarters established there. National Police and Vietnamese Marines encircled the pagoda by 1305, but were unable to force entrance. Airstrikes were called in on the complex and it was seized by 1705.<sup>10/</sup>

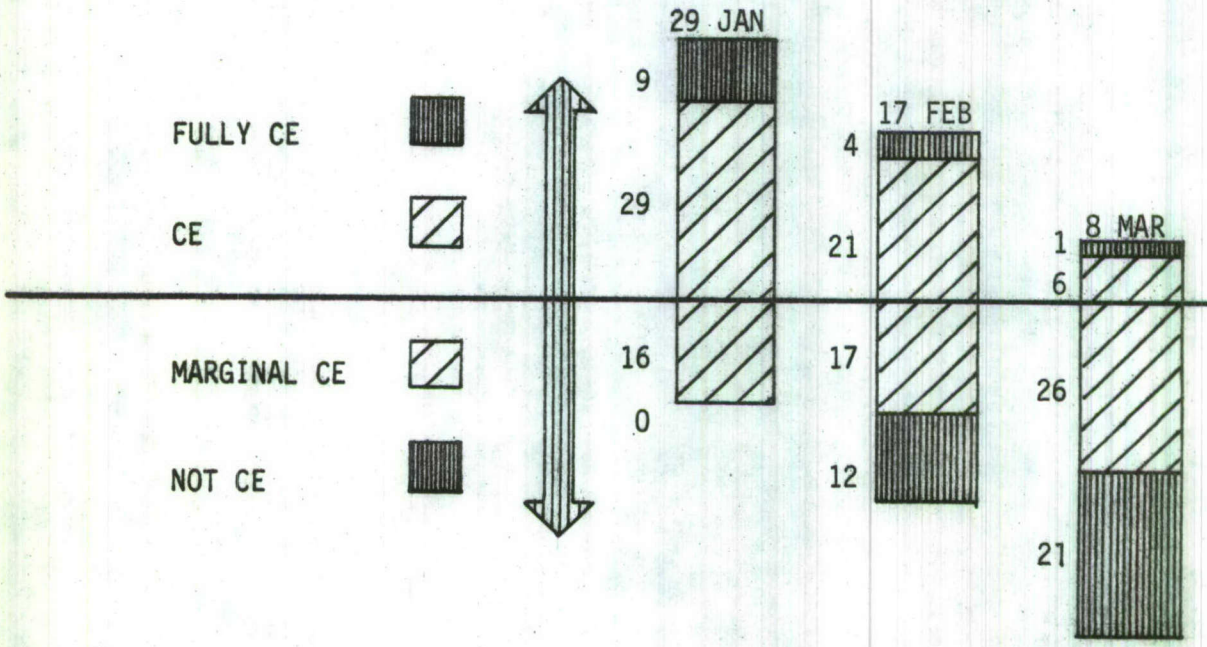
Throughout the day on 2 February, there were many reports and sightings of VC units moving or attempting to mass, but they were constantly harassed by air and artillery strikes, helicopter gunships, and by US/GVN units reacting quickly to intelligence information and now conducting sweep operations in suspected VC locations. The major attempt to capture the city of Saigon appeared to be broken. Enemy forces still had the capability to initiate attacks against individual installations, but not with the magnitude of the first two days. Many reports indicated that VC units were becoming disorganized and disoriented as they were losing coordination and control from parent units

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ESTIMATED COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS (CE)  
OF IDENTIFIED  
VC/NVA MANEUVER BNS\* IN III CTZ  
ON 29 JAN 1968



\* (INF) BNS

FIGURE 1

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and were attempting to extract themselves from the city. During the night, helicopter gunships, aircraft, and river patrol boats raked suspected or known crossing points along the Saigon River. Twenty sampans were spotted on the river and were engaged by aircraft firing rockets and miniguns. All vessels were sunk with secondary explosions occurring.<sup>11/</sup>

Early on 3 February, the Thu Duc District Police Headquarters was hit by a heavy ground attack by an estimated two battalions armed with automatic weapons, B-40 rockets, machineguns, and mortars. District forces, reinforced by elements of a U.S. company and three Popular Force platoons, repulsed the attack with the help of minigun-firing aircraft, gunships, and flareships. Forty VC bodies were found later in the morning.<sup>12/</sup>

Fighting raged in Gia Dinh and Cholon for the next few days, highlighted by a report from ARVN Intelligence that a large weapons cache was located in a factory west of Tan Son Nhut. U.S. tactical air took the building under fire, followed by a U.S. Army sweep of the building and area that revealed 162 enemy killed and over 100 individual and crew-served weapons destroyed or captured. There were no friendly losses.

Continuing reports from the Joint Defense Operations Center and other sources indicated that the VC were either digging in or withdrawing. A MACV summary of action in Saigon on 3 February was reported as generally quiet with indications that the VC were trying to withdraw.<sup>13/</sup>

On 5 February, the VC attempted to regain the initiative in Saigon. They attacked south Cholon, pushing northeast, but were stopped by ARVN units.

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Elements of the 1st, 9th, and 25th U.S. Divisions surrounded Saigon while ARVN units continued to sweep the city. There was further evidence that surviving VC, in fragmented groups, were beginning to exfiltrate. Also on 5 February, the ARVN initiated Operation TRAN HUNG DAO with five battalions to search and destroy enemy still in Saigon and its environs. On 6 February, elements of the 199th Infantry Brigade air assaulted into a hot landing zone near Saigon and met stiff resistance from an enemy company. Seven helicopters were downed in the engagement with two U.S. killed and nine wounded.<sup>14/</sup>

During the following few days, VC actions were sharply reduced with the only sizable enemy force remaining at the Phu Tho Racetrack in west Cholon, where they continued to fight sporadically until 21 February.<sup>15/</sup> The Phu Tho Racetrack, located on the western edge of the city in direct line of march, proved to be a rallying point for future assaults.

The VC seized and tried to hold the racetrack for several reasons:

- It was a good rallying point for VC unfamiliar with Saigon.
- It was at the center of a good road net.
- It had a large covered area, suitable for a hospital.
- It denied the U.S. forces a large LZ inside the city.
- It was within 82mm mortar range of Tan Son Nhut.

Approximately two kilometers west of the track, a U.S. element found the main VC command post in a pagoda. Surrounding it, they destroyed the VC defending force and captured the headquarters, taking three prisoners and

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killing 49, including General Tran Do, the commander of all VC forces attacking Saigon.

On 9 February, the Operational Intelligence Division of the VNAF reported that as of 1600 hours, there had been 3,560 enemy killed, 1,095 detained, and 1,262 weapons captured. Friendly casualties included 325 Free World Forces killed with 1,141 wounded and three missing. The VNAF had provided the bulk of the tactical air support for TRAN HUNG DAO, logging 46 A-1 and 15 F-5 sorties. The results of this air activity included: 65 VC killed by air, 95 structures destroyed, one AAA position destroyed, and 75 bunkers damaged. <sup>16/</sup>  
(Fig. 2.)

There was no restraint to damage exercised by the enemy during the Tet attack and, as usual, the civilian populace was hit hardest. By 15 February, there were a total of 225,810 refugees reported within the city limits of Saigon, 564 civilians killed, 2,853 civilians wounded, and 17,886 homes destroyed. <sup>17/</sup>

Quyét Thang/Toan Thang

After the VC Tet Offensive, III Corps started the Quyét Thang (Resolved to Win) Campaign. This operation aimed at regaining the initiative and widening the ring of security around the capital and the five surrounding provinces. By 29 March, the campaign had swept through Gia Dinh, Long An, Hau Nghia, Binh Duong, and Bien Hoa Provinces. At that date the enemy had lost 1,000 killed in action and large enemy caches continued to be found. <sup>18/</sup>

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On 2 April, a large cache of munitions was found including 116 82mm rounds, further indicating the enemy's efforts to establish a supply of munitions near Saigon for use in attacking by fire and conducting harassing actions during the renewal of the offensive. Quyet Thang ended on 7 April and had accounted for 2,658 enemy killed and 427 detained.<sup>19/</sup>

After the "Resolved to Win" Campaign came the Toan Thang (Complete Victory) Campaign. This campaign started on 1 April and, in addition to the same purpose as "Resolved to Win", was directed at hitting VC forces before they infiltrated the capital. This effort was to provide effective protection for the capital. The elements assigned to the campaign were impressive:<sup>20/</sup>

1st Infantry Division	ARVN 5th Division
25th Infantry Division	ARVN 25th Division
9th Infantry Division	5th ARVN Ranger Group
196th Light Infantry Brigade	199th Light Infantry Brigade
11th Air Cavalry	1st ARVN Task Force
3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division	

There can be no doubt that Toan Thang had an extremely debilitating effect on the VC ability to maintain pressure on the CMD. The cumulative results by the end of April showed 7,645 enemy KIA and 1,708 detainees. Regardless of the losses, however, it was apparent that he intended to remain close to Saigon and "cling" to the city.<sup>21/</sup> At 2400 hours on 31 May, the first phase of Toan Thang terminated with the following results:<sup>22/</sup>

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### BATTLE LOSSES III CTZ

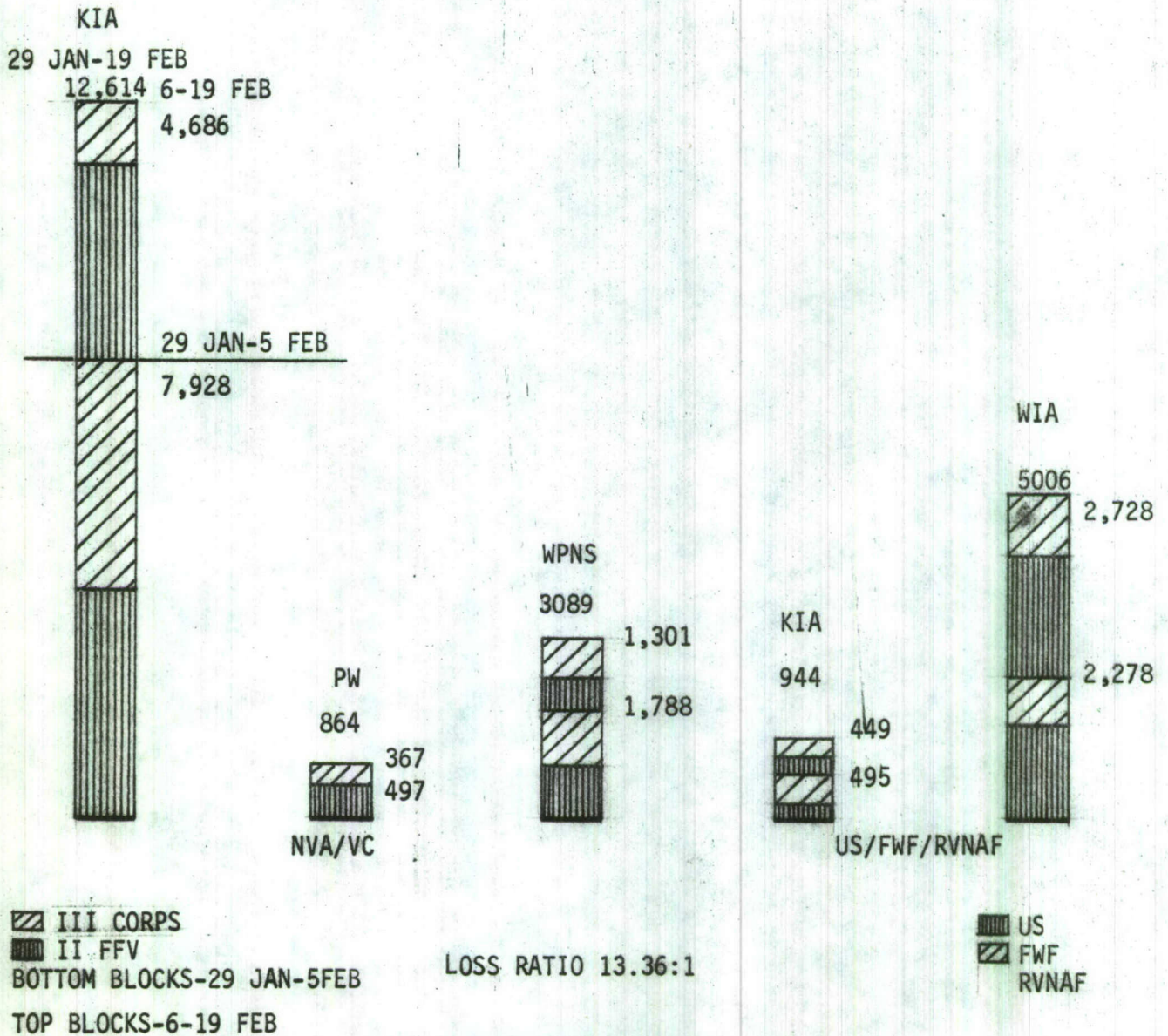


FIGURE 2

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Friendly KIA - 1,348 (564 U.S., 762 ARVN, 23 FWF)

Friendly WIA - 6,928 (3,620 U.S., 2,570 ARVN, 99 FWF)

Enemy KIA - 11,894 and 2,123 detained.

The second phase of Toan Thang was initiated on 1 June and continued as of late August.

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CHAPTER II

INTERLUDE

Characteristically, the Tet Offensive against Saigon did not have a definite termination date, but, after 9 February, only occasional engagements were reported by allied forces. The enemy had gradually withdrawn to regroup, reequip, and reevaluate his effort. There were definite intelligence indications that large enemy forces, though many were not combat effective, still ringed the sprawling city.

A captured enemy document assessing the Tet Offensive gave the usual platitudes. One was "The attack was conducted in a decisive manner with determination and bravery". But, commenting on the political actions aimed at fostering a general uprising, the document admitted the offensive had failed:<sup>1/</sup>

*"The political actions aimed at fostering a general uprising were not carried out in a concerted manner and were very weak. Although the political attitude of friendly troops was good and the people gave very favorable support, the General Uprising could not be instigated everywhere (in some places [the people] followed friendly troops [to stage an uprising]; at others, they did not)....The results obtained were not satisfactory."*

The enemy assessment of the performance of allied troops and equipment was generally deprecatory, such as "Enemy tanks were not very effective, infantry troops were very poor". This general philosophy of praising their performance while playing down the other side lends more credence to the statement made by a member of the Communists' Central Executive Committee of

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NVN: "The enemy was effective in launching counterattacks by using helicopters and by strafing from the air."<sup>2/</sup>

Further attesting to air effectiveness was another enemy document captured on 24 February:<sup>3/</sup>

*"After suffering heavy losses everywhere, the enemy has been using aircraft to drop bombs savagely on cities, towns, and densely populated areas. These bombs, including napalm and phosphorous bombs, caused heavy damage to a number of towns, including the houses and population. In some areas, our troops did not establish an air defense system in a timely manner directly after their occupation of the towns and as a result they suffered casualties inflicted on cadre and soldiers. To limit all above damages, it is requested that the various units:*

*"Take defensive action against enemy aircraft during their occupation of and bivouac in certain towns or areas and organize an antiaircraft system among the troops and, to a larger extent, among the people. Observation and alert measures must be taken against enemy air activities.*

*"Send unnecessary forces out of the towns and areas where the people, especially aged ones and children, are crowded. Disperse these troops when stationing them.*

*"Be prepared to treat those who are wounded or burned."*

Airstrikes and visual reconnaissance also disrupted the enemy efforts at resupplying and feeding his troops. This intense air activity kept him off balance and resulted in a delayed offensive timetable.<sup>4/</sup> The document continued:

*"According to your message, a fleet of our transportation boats was attacked by enemy aircraft on the night of 16 February [1968].*

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"1. It is requested that this be reaffirmed since 23 sampans could hardly carry 100 gia (unit of measure equivalent to 36 kilos) (of rice). Specifically, how much and what type (of goods) was damaged or lost.

"2. It is necessary to supply the battlefield actively and promptly, but you should properly perform leadership, keep the transportation routes from being discovered, regularly popularize the regulations and have strict control. Every opportunity must be taken, but you must move continuously in small teams instead of large groups to prevent discovery by enemy aircraft equipped with searchlights.

" - Investigations must be made to change the movement route and the method of moving because the enemy has discovered this route.

"After being attacked on the night of 16 February, our men continued to move in large groups along the same route and, as a result, on the night of 18 February, they were attacked (by air) for the second time.

"3. Work out plans concerning escorts, camouflage, disguise, observation stations, etc. (sic) to ensure good results for transportation activities.

"4. Study should be made to activate a number of anti-aircraft cells.

"5. Reply as soon as possible because the comrades in the headquarters are very anxious. You are requested to reaffirm the above and report it immediately."

The Communists realized that one of the most effective weapons of war - the element of surprise - could no longer be employed against Saigon in future battles. This opinion was revealed by interrogating ralliers and examining captured papers. Speaking of advantages and disadvantages, an enemy document stated there would be no surprise factor exploited on any

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subsequent attacks on Saigon by the VC/NVA since Saigon was now on the defensive and the FWMAF/RVNAF therein were well prepared.<sup>5/</sup>

In a resolution concerning the cities, another captured document clearly pointed out that the future strategy of the Communists would center around attacks on cities, particularly Saigon. They felt that the allied strategy had been completely upset. The capital was turned into a battlefield and had ceased to be a safe rear area. This formerly safe city had become a battle target and had no defense capability; therefore, "The enemy's political stand has collapsed or diminished in prestige, because no matter what they said, everybody saw that they were not able to hold the cities." Concerning future plans, the document outlined three principal requirements concerning the capital:<sup>6/</sup>

"1. We should occupy as many sections of the city and destroy as many enemy troops as possible. We should bring about a situation where we can encircle the enemy from within the city. Since Q1 and Q2 (possibly the first and second precincts) are the enemy's lair, we should occupy them for many days, bringing war into the city.

"2. We should launch the movement of popular guerrilla warfare in the city, maintain our mastery of the people and coordinate the people's activity with other activities.

"3. We should rapidly develop our political and armed forces one step further in each phase in order to create conditions to eliminate enemy positions one by one."

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CHAPTER III

SECOND WAVE

On Sunday, 18 February, at 0115 hours, Tan Son Nhut came under attack by fire. The base received a total of 81 rounds of mixed 122mm rocket and 82mm mortar fire resulting in 33 aircraft damaged and six destroyed. That same day, three rounds of 122mm rockets impacted in the vicinity of the C-130 ramp, the Civil Engineering area, and the helicopter pad. One round hit the old base exchange, killing one and wounding six. Early on 19 February, the Saigon Civilian Air Terminal was hit by a rocket round which killed one person and wounded many others. During these two days there were eight separate instances of rocket and mortar attacks which accounted for six killed and 151 wounded.<sup>1/</sup>

The next attack of significance occurred on 24 February, when again Tan Son Nhut was subjected to a rocket attack. Early that morning, 20 rounds of mixed rockets and mortars hit the base causing damage to buildings on the base and killing four U.S. personnel and wounding 21.<sup>2/</sup>

During this period, there were no major ground assaults on Saigon, but enemy units appeared to have again moved closer to the outskirts of the city, for, on 24 February, U.S. elements contacted an unknown sized enemy force just three kilometers northeast of Saigon. Reflecting a change in VC tactics from large ground assaults to harassment, VNAF Intelligence reported, on 27 February, that an unknown number of VC, disguised as civilians, were mixing with the residents in the heart of Saigon. They were urging the people, whose homes had been destroyed during early February, to rise up against the government.

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The VC claimed that the government troops had been ordered to open fire on the people's homes with the intent of destroying them so that the property could be used to construct buildings for high ranking officials and armed forces personnel.<sup>3/</sup>

The rocket attacks on Tan Son Nhut and Saigon, accompanied by heavy propaganda and terrorism, heralded a new era of the Communist attempt to subvert the people of Vietnam. Such standoff attacks with heavy weapons decreased his casualties by permitting delivery from a relatively safe distance.

The 122mm Rocket

The 122mm rocket was the newest and most sophisticated in the Soviet arsenal and its employment by the VC provided them with a lightweight weapon which had the firepower equal to a 155mm howitzer. It was first introduced into South Vietnam in early March 1967 with an attack on Camp Carroll, a Marine base below the DMZ. From that time the rocket appeared further and further south until it was finally employed against Saigon in February 1968. Some of the statistics of the 122mm rocket were:<sup>4/</sup>

Characteristics

- Rocket-fin/spin stabilized
- Length-6.2 feet
- Weight-101 pounds
- Range -11,000 meters
- Warhead-15 pounds explosive
- Fuze-instantaneous or delay

Launcher

- Length-8.1 feet
- Weight-55 pounds

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Emplacement time-2.5 minutes  
Displacement time-2 minutes

No site preparation was necessary prior to the attack except for surveying the launch positions. Figures 3 and 4 show the rudimentary preparations. The short bamboo sticks were used for aiming stakes. Figure 5 typifies a 140mm rocket in place and ready to fire. Figure 6 depicts the size of a 122mm rocket and launcher.

Equipment and personnel were moved into the site under cover of darkness and preparations completed and the rockets readied for firing within three hours. Prior attacks suggest the enemy preferred a launch site between 9,000 and 11,000 meters from the target. The launchers and rockets were portable when disassembled into three or four parts and, consequently, launching positions were easily moved. The use of waterways, oxcarts, bicycles, and trucks to convey the weapon system increased the mobility and decreased porter requirements.<sup>5/</sup>

Immediately following the missile barrage, an extensive operation was conducted to identify the locations of enemy rocket and mortar positions around Tan Son Nhut/Saigon. This operation was generated by the 7AF Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence. A massive intelligence collection effort was launched. Detailed analysis was made of enemy tactics from available intelligence data and new information was obtained by 7AF DIS from onsite Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams, U.S. Army Ordnance Teams, Photo Interpreters, and from Hand-Held Photos taken by Forward Air Controllers.<sup>6/</sup>

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ENEMY ROCKET LAUNCH POSITION

Figure 3

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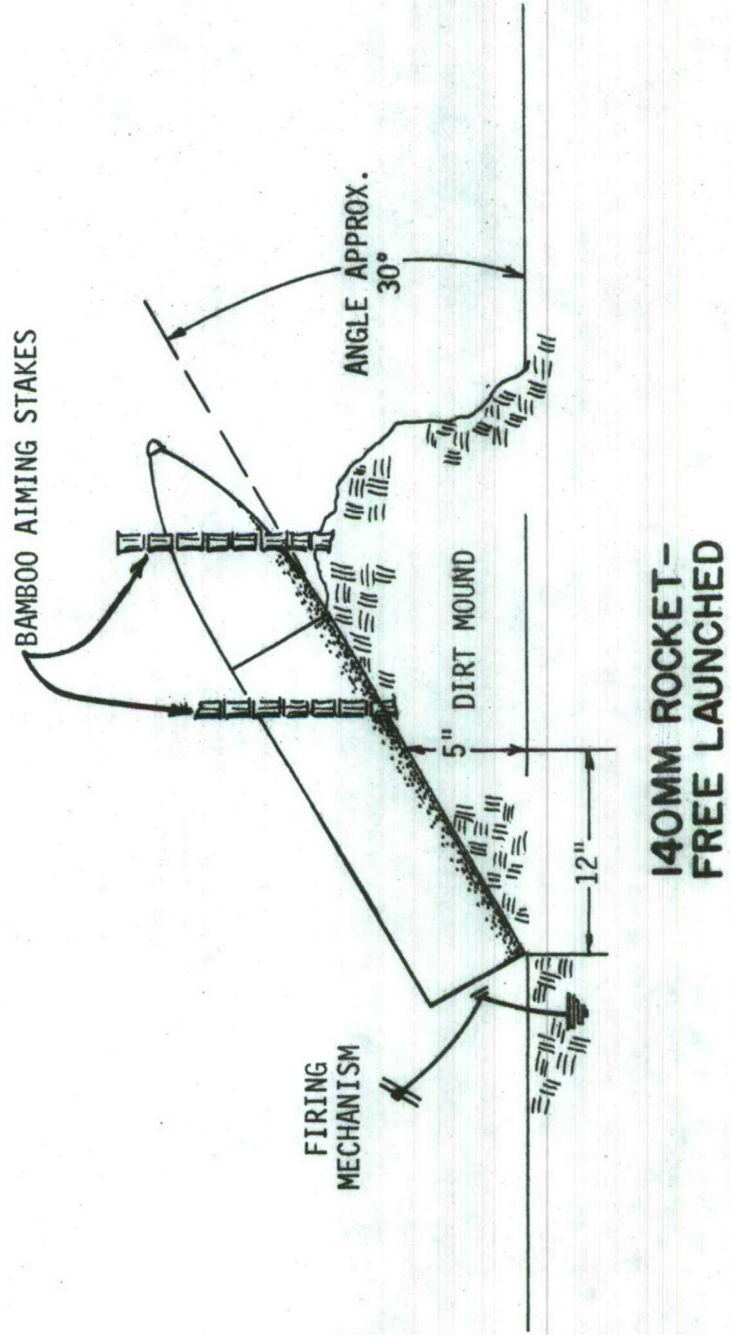


ENEMY ROCKET LAUNCH POSITION

Figure 4

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FIGURE 5

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CAPTURED 122MM ROCKET AND LAUNCHER

Figure 6

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The day after the first attack, 21 photo reconnaissance missions were flown around Tan Son Nhut to a distance of seven miles. The area was extended out to eleven miles the following day. A large processing and photo interpretation operation was initiated by the 12th Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron and the 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. By 21 April 1968, 92 recce missions produced 43,440 feet of original negative film plus 140,876 feet of duplicate positive film which required detailed readout by a team of over 100 photo interpreters combined with the resources of the 460th RTS, 16th PPIF, 12th RITS, and CICV. The analysis of enemy tactics, coupled with interpretation of the film, identified 116 possible rocket positions, 60 mortar positions, 49 AW positions, numerous bunkers, 83 trenches, 21 storage areas, over 1,300 foxholes, 48 personnel, and four tunnel/cave entrances. Although verification later disclosed that some of the suspected sites were friendly locations, those that were enemy were brought under fire. The photo interpreters were briefed by 7AF analysts and many were sent on FAC flights to provide them with additional background to better identify rocket sites, and the presence of enemy in a particular area. The success of Operation TAN SON NHUT can be best illustrated by the capture of three primary rocket sites. Analysis of all available intelligence by 7AF DIS determined that the rockets launched on 24 February came from an area approximately nine kilometers due north of Tan Son Nhut. This analysis was based on the enemy tactics and took into consideration the following: <sup>7/</sup>

- During the period 9 to 18 February, approximately 500 enemy sampans were sighted on both sides of the Cambodian border northwest of TSN. Many of these were brought under fire and destroyed by tactical airstrikes, but a number of

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them escaped and in all probability reached their destination. Analysis indicated that the rockets were brought in by sampan (due to their heavy weight) and concealed.

- Launch sites were chosen to provide camouflage particularly from aerial surveillance, but a fairly open field of fire was required due to the low launch trajectory. Analysis determined that the launch sites were due north of TSN between 7,000 and 11,000 meters and largely along tree-lined streams. The area was comparatively free of civilian huts or structures, had open fields of fire, and the streams meandering through the area were tree-lined.
- A detailed readout of film flown on 24 February 1968 identified at least four sampans, 8,000 meters north of the base, which could have been used to carry in the rockets. Two kilometers north of the sampans two large boats and 17 personnel were located by photo interpreters. They could not be identified as friendly. A FAC was briefed concerning the boats and a particularly suspicious ricefield containing long rows of rice straw piled high enough to easily hide rockets and their launchers. Hand-held photographs were taken which failed to reveal the actual rockets, but which further strengthened suspicion of the area. The results of the analysis and the "hot news" items were provided to 25th U.S. Infantry and other interested agencies.
- On 27 February 1968, U.S. forces fought their way into the enemy base camp located in the exact area that the intelligence data indicated would be lucrative. In the action the 14th Battalion/9th Infantry Regiment of the 25th Division located three rocket launcher sites and captured a significant amount of rockets and supporting supplies. At least six rocket launching positions were located in each site. Two of the sites were located along an east-west line of palm trees and foliage bordering a stream and swampy area. The suspect ricefield next to the stream contained one of the rocket sites. The third site was on dry ground, but less than a kilometer from the boats which had been discovered on photography. The rocket sites were difficult to spot from the air, but detailed photointerpretation, and close coordination with the Army greatly aided in the final location and destruction of these sites. Difficulties were encountered in the dissemination of "hot item" reports due to the number of involved commands in and around the Saigon area. This was resolved by the placement of direct liaison

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to/with 7AF/DI, 7AF/TACC, MACV-COC, MACV J-2,  
II FFV, 25 Infantry Division, CICV, CIIB, and  
JDOC.

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CHAPTER IV

MAY OFFENSIVE

The long anticipated second offensive of the Spring Campaign began on the night of 4-5 May 1968. An analysis of VC-initiated incidents since Tet revealed that, for the most part, activity had been low level harassment carried out by local forces and guerrillas. At the same time, the bulk of the enemy's main forces in III Corps moved into the Saigon area.<sup>1/</sup>

The attack was not a surprise as was the Tet Offensive for there were many intelligence indicators of an impending resurgence of the Communist offensive. Early on 4 May, COMUSMACV was informed that a highly reliable agent, who had direct access to intelligence sources, reported that orders had been issued to subordinate units for the attack on Saigon, which was to take place early on 5 May. The agent also stated that one company-size unit had already been deployed to the edge of Saigon awaiting the attack signal.<sup>2/</sup> Further enforcing friendly knowledge of an impending attack was an incident which occurred on 26 April when allied forces wounded and captured a VC doctor with the rank of captain in Bien Hoa Province. An entry in the detainee's diary indicated that the third phase of the general offensive was to start on 28 April.<sup>3/</sup>

The Communist forces were also well aware that the principle of surprise would not be effective during their May Offensive. A captured enemy document entitled, "Mission and Requirements for the City" prescribed that during the forthcoming attack on Saigon there would be no surprise factor to be exploited

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by VC/NVA forces since Saigon was now on the defensive and FVMAF/RVNAF forces were well prepared.<sup>4/</sup>

Opposing Forces

Various U.S. and Republic of Vietnam units participated in the 5-12 May offensive:<sup>5/</sup>

U.S. ARMY UNITS

Elements, 1st Infantry Division  
Elements, 9th Infantry Division  
Elements, 25th Infantry Division  
Elements, 199th Light Infantry Brigade  
Elements, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment  
120th Assault Helicopter Company  
2/13th Artillery  
2/40th Artillery

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM UNITS

Marine Task Force  
Airborne Task Force  
ARVN Support Units  
National Police  
Regional Forces  
5th Ranger Group  
5th Airborne Battalion

The 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion engaged in some of the bitterest fighting near the battle-scarred Phu Tho Racetrack, which was also the scene of sharp encounters during the Tet Offensive.

The G-2 Section of the CMD identified the following enemy units which struck from all four cardinal points:<sup>6/</sup>

EAST: 2d Mobile Force Battalion, 274th Regiment, 5th VC Division

WEST: Elements of 271st, 272d, and 273d Regiments, 9th VC Division

SOUTH: 2d Independent Local Force Battalion  
506th Independent Local Force Battalion  
Phu Loi Regiment

NORTH: 101st North Vietnamese Regiment

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All friendly units attached to or under operational control of Headquarters, CMD, had been operating in the outlying areas surrounding the city of Saigon since the start of the Tet Offensive. Based on intelligence reports, these forces were relocated in early May to the so-called "Inner Ring" of defense which was designed to prevent the enemy from seizing control.<sup>7/</sup>

### The Assault

The enemy initiated the offensive at 0400 on 5 May by attacking the Newport Bridge on the eastern edge of the city. At the same time, one enemy platoon wearing Vietnamese Marine uniforms assaulted Vietnamese Marine elements two kilometers west of the bridge. Approximately 30 minutes later, heavy fighting broke out west of the Phu Tho Racetrack with a VC force estimated at battalion-size transporting heavy weapons, including anti-aircraft guns.<sup>8/</sup>

By 1000 on the 5th, the ARVN Airborne Task Force was heavily engaged north of Tan Son Nhut and the 11th Airborne Battalion had encountered a reinforced enemy company. Two Vietnamese airstrikes, U.S. Light Fire Teams, and artillery supported the engagement.<sup>9/</sup>

On 6 May, at approximately 0715, a CMD FAC, during a visual reconnaissance mission, took two hits in the wing of his O-1 aircraft while flying at 1500 feet near the village of Ap Hoa Thanh on Saigon's western edge. Later that day, elements of the 3/4th Cavalry near that village sustained a number of casualties. ARVN CMD clearance was requested for airstrikes and granted by late afternoon. Before the strike, psychological warfare aircraft dropped leaflets and, through loudspeaker transmissions, warned all civilians to clear

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the area. The FAC reported no civilian activity in that locale. During the next four days and three nights, a total of 40 tactical air sorties were flown in support of 3/4th Cavalry activity. An ARVN Ranger sweep of the village on 10 May revealed a 130 VC body count.<sup>10/</sup>

On 6 May, the 30th ARVN Ranger Battalion joined a U.S. cavalry troop to assault a hamlet adjacent to the Phu Tho Racetrack which contained a heavy VC concentration. As the combined forces entered the hamlet, they received mortar/rocket fire and were beaten back. Unable to advance, the troop commander called in U.S. airstrikes and artillery that night. On 7 May, the cavalry troop moved into the bombarded hamlet, meeting little resistance and made a 200 VC body count.<sup>11/</sup>

Also on 6 May, the 33d ARVN Battalion was sent to relieve the pinned down 30th and immediately met stiff resistance. The battalion tried twice to push onward, but was beaten back each time by automatic weapons and mortar fire. The Senior U.S. Advisor of the ARVN battalion called in three U.S. airstrikes and one Light Fire Team. The air sorties came in with 500-pound bombs and napalm. The U.S. Advisor's counterpart requested and received Vietnamese artillery support and the Advisor requested U.S. artillery, but did not receive clearance from the Vietnamese.<sup>12/</sup>

On the same day, an element of the 3/4th Cavalry was ordered to clear and secure a hamlet west of Cholon. The ARVN Ranger Commander informed the Commander, 3/4th Cavalry, that he would not participate in the attack unless three buildings in the hamlet were first destroyed. The ARVN Commander had

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interviewed refugees the night before and received information pertaining to VC presence in those buildings. Accordingly, the 3/4th Cavalry Commander called in an airstrike on the buildings, which destroyed them with napalm, causing a large secondary explosion in one of the buildings and a fire that burned for two days.<sup>13/</sup>

Another VC-held village in western Saigon was engaged by the U.S. 199th Light Infantry Brigade on 6 May, beginning three days of bitter fighting. A rifle company of the 199th performing a reconnaissance in force mission was pinned down by heavy RPG, automatic weapons, and AK-47 fire as it approached the village from the south. Another company was moved in from the east and passed through the eastern portion of the village unopposed, when it came under heavy fire. The civilian noncombatants had evacuated the area; therefore, the CO requested airstrikes. After four strikes, the VC fire seemed to subside and the company on the east began moving again. It had only moved a short distance when, once again, it was stopped by intensive VC fire. More airstrikes and artillery were called in, but as night fell, fire was still being received from the VC and it continued throughout the night.<sup>14/</sup>

Early the next morning, the company in the south received a heavy volley of RPG fire. The company CO decided to put in six more airstrikes. The second day was almost a repeat of the first as, throughout the day, heavy VC fire greeted any effort to advance. Additional airstrikes and artillery were put in, but, once again as night fell, fire was still being received in volume from the enemy.<sup>15/</sup>

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The morning of the third day, ten more airstrikes were cleared for 750-pound bombs with delayed fuzes, after which the company was finally able to complete the sweep. Once the western portion of the village was breeched, it became obvious why there had been so much trouble taking the position. Bunkers were built under the concrete slabs of houses with as many as eight tunnels radiating out like spokes of a wheel to ground level bunkers. "The only thing which knocked out these positions was the 750-pound fuze delay bombs."<sup>16/</sup>

Meanwhile, the 35th ARVN Ranger Battalion was working primarily with the National Police and had formed a blocking line at the southwest corner of Cholon. Initial contact was sporadic until 7 May, when they received orders to assault north. During the initial assault, the Rangers received B-40 rockets which were described by the U.S. Senior Advisor as "coming in like hail". The battalion withdrew 500 meters and, at 1100, called in airstrikes and Vietnamese artillery. Even though the VC were attempting to counter the effectiveness of air by using antiaircraft weapons, the U.S. Advisor stated that the airstrikes were on target with 250- and 500-pound bombs followed by napalm. The VC were routed by the heavy pounding and fled to the east and west.

At 1500 hours, the U.S. Advisor again requested airstrikes, but was denied and strongly advised to assault. The battalion struck, but immediately met a strong counter-assault and made no further advance the remainder of the day. Later that night, friendly forces noted a tall, substantial building which appeared to be used as a VC hospital or body collection point. Air-<sup>17/</sup> strikes were requested, but no action was taken against the building.

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At least 79 tactical aircraft were scrambled in the Saigon area on 7 May in support of troops in contact. Further, approximately 50 percent of the reconnaissance sorties flown in-country were assigned targets in the Saigon area in an attempt to locate enemy positions.<sup>18/</sup>

On 8 May, the 38th ARVN Ranger Battalion relieved the 35th and began a westward sweep. However, they made little progress until elements of a U.S. cavalry troop assaulted the entrenched VC positions, subsequently forcing the enemy to withdraw. Early on 9 May, the 38th continued to meet heavy resistance from an estimated VC battalion. An airstrike was called in at 1700 and a sweep of the area the following morning revealed 45 bodies.<sup>19/</sup> The 38th remained in contact throughout the day and night of 9 May with a reinforced enemy company which appeared to be the last of the enemy's forces in the Phu Tho Racetrack area. It appeared the enemy was withdrawing.<sup>20/</sup>

On 10 May, the 33d ARVN Ranger Battalion swept the area near Phu Tho which had received the airstrikes on 6 May. In this vicinity they found: three AK-47 rifles, one M-60 machinegun, one M-16 rifle, one B-40 rocket launcher, one B-41 rocket launcher, 100 grenades, a U.S. gas mask, assorted maps, and nine VC bodies. These results caused the U.S. Advisor to "consider the airstrikes of 6 May successful".<sup>21/</sup>

Early on 11 May, the 38th ARVN battalion began a sweep northward, encountering stubborn resistance. The Advisor reported:<sup>22/</sup>

*"The Rangers were unable to advance during the day and airstrikes were called on coordinates XS795905 (approximately one kilometer west of Phu Tho) that*

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night. The airstrikes consisted of 4 sorties dropping fragmentation bombs and napalm on the VC positions. A sweep of the area the following morning uncovered approximately 100 well fortified bunkers. The bunkers were well camouflaged and the position is believed to have been an enemy regimental headquarters. The airstrikes occurred shortly before darkness and the VC were able to police up the weapons of their fallen comrades. Consequently, very few enemy weapons were found, but approximately 100 VC were killed by the airstrikes. Captured prisoners indicated the light fire teams artillery had little effect against the fortified positions, but the napalm was extremely effective."

The 3/4th U.S. Cavalry was withdrawn on 11 May, and the ARVN Rangers assumed approximately the same area of operations which they had been assigned prior to the offensive. The second offensive against Saigon was considered terminated on 11 May as all enemy main force units were withdrawing from the area.<sup>23/</sup> However, operations continued on 12 May within the CMD as light sniper fire was encountered. Also on 12 May, the 33d Ranger Battalion swept a village north of Phu Tho which had been struck by air and artillery and uncovered 100 VC bodies in the rubble.<sup>24/</sup>

Reflecting the shock value of airstrikes in softening up enemy positions plus the need for rapid ground follow-up, one U.S. Advisor, in an after action report, stated:<sup>25/</sup>

"...the Rangers waited too long to assault after receiving air support. This delay would permit the VC to recover from the airstrike, artillery, etc., and brace themselves for the ground attack. Further, the Light Fire Teams and artillery are relatively ineffective for this type fighting and I much prefer airstrikes."

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Another Advisor commented on the VC bodies which were found when ARVN Airborne troops swept an area after an air and artillery barrage: "The ground was littered with VC bodies...noted that the bodies were mature, well-equipped, and well-fed soldiers."<sup>26/</sup>

The enemy's final act of the May Offensive was to heavily damage the Newport River Bridge located on Saigon's eastern edge. In the early morning hours of 12 May, 82mm mortars and small arms were fired into the bridge area. A U.S. Advisor was located in the turret of a tank with an FM radio and his counterpart was inside the tank. The Advisor did not request Light Fire Teams, illumination, airstrikes, or artillery fire support. The only illumination provided by friendly ground sources - the ARVN Marine Task Force - was not continuous. In most cases, a few minutes elapsed between rounds, consequently allowing the enemy to move around boxes and buildings during the periods of darkness. At 0245, a loud explosion was heard. The enemy had placed explosives on two posts at the water level and, when detonated, caused 100 feet of the north lane to collapse, reducing the flow of traffic from four to two lanes. The enemy withdrew by 0400 and the exchange of fire ceased.<sup>27/</sup>

#### Psywar

Prior to 5 May, the Psywar Program conducted recovery operations from the Tet Offensive which primarily consisted of civic action (humanitarian relief) projects. The long range programs were directed at the enemy forces, outlining their shortcomings during Tet and declaring the ideology of Communism invalid. At the outbreak on 5 May, the Psywar Teams had to discontinue long range programs, which had normal priority, and once again, as during Tet, concentrate

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on civic action projects. Also, loudspeaker missions and leaflet drops were flown in direct support of combat operations. The loudspeaker missions broadcast news and extended pleas to the people to support the government. <sup>28/</sup>

Strike/Reconnaissance Effort

During the period 5-31 May, a total of 500 fixed wing sorties struck within a radius of eight kilometers from the center of Saigon. The VNAF A-1Hs and F-5s accounted for 185 of the sorties. USAF F-100s carried the bulk of the American effort with a total of 241 sorties, while the A-37s and F-4s had 50 and 24, respectively. The known results of the strikes are depicted below (destroyed and damaged bunkers and structures are grouped under one figure): <sup>29/</sup>

<u>KBA</u>	<u>STRUCTURES</u>	<u>BUNKERS</u>	<u>SECONDARY EXPLOSIONS</u>
119	756	360	19

Not included in the structures damaged or destroyed column is a combat mission report by the flight leader of three VNAF A-1Hs which struck in the heart of Cholon on 7 May. He could only report, "Many destroyed". On 9 May, a flight of two F-100s reported 103 structures destroyed after a strike in a heavily populated area on the southern edge of the city. <sup>30/</sup>

To illustrate the type ordnance delivered by tac air, gunships, and artillery during the period 5-13 May, the following list shows the fire support in Precinct 8 (south of the Saigon River): <sup>31/</sup>

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<u>TACTICAL AIR</u>		<u>GUNSHIPS</u>		<u>ARTILLERY (US and VN)</u>	
<u>WEIGHT</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>CALIBER</u>	<u>ROUNDS</u>	<u>CALIBER</u>	<u>ROUNDS</u>
250 lbs	2	7.62mm	173,084	105mm	4,403
500 lbs	117	2.75in Rkts	1,447	155mm	83
750 lbs	14	40mm	761	8in	37
Napalm	80	TOTAL	175,292	TOTAL	4,523
TOTAL	213				

In III Corps, U.S. FAC missions controlling fighters rose by 192 over April's effort, while the VNAF FAC sorties rose dramatically from 33 in April to 73 in May. The visual reconnaissance sorties of the VNAF remained constant for both months; however, the USAF effort decreased by 72 in May, reflecting the increase of fighter control missions. <sup>32/</sup>

The 7AF photo reconnaissance effort in the defense of Saigon was quite significant. In an area around the city bounded by UTM grids XS 600800 - XS 990800 - XT 990100 - XT 600100, which is approximately 1200 square kilometers, there were 79 reconnaissance sorties flown in a 30-day period between 15 May and 13 June 1968. A total of 87 targets were covered and film analysis showed that 56 of the targets received 85 percent or better coverage, for a 64 percent success rate. This total includes 47 reconnaissance plan missions (missions that are a result of a MACV J-2 once-a-month schedule on projected reconnaissance requirements), 10 Army, and 22 Air Force special add-ons. Reconnaissance plans and Army request missions had the objective of developing target base data and locating enemy defenses. Seventh Air Force, on its own initiative, generated and processed 22 photo missions for special coverage of the Saigon area. This coverage included 13 missions for the preparation of

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an uncontrolled 1:5000 scale mosaic for use by ground units in planning local security. Six special missions were flown to further develop significant findings on the above mosaics. The last three missions provided high acuity coverage of urban Saigon and the imagery, plots, traces, and interpretation reports were provided to the field commanders. Neither Infrared nor Side Looking Radar was used by 7AF reconnaissance aircraft. <sup>33/</sup>

Of the targets covered, 27 significant intelligence items were found: twelve concentrations of foxholes, six bunkers, two bridges, four automatic weapons positions, and three communications sites. Seven of the significant items were targeted and struck. <sup>34/</sup> For a comparison, the photo reconnaissance sorties flown in May in III Corps increased by 145 over those flown in April, rising from 731 to 876. The bulk of the increase was absorbed by RF-4 aircraft, whose sortie effort rose from 292 to 439. <sup>35/</sup>

In the same 30-day period, 19 C-47 gunship (Spooky) missions expended 574 flares and 75,300 rounds of 7.62mm ordnance. Most of the expenditure was in support of 12 incidents of troops in contact. In addition, one rocket position was attacked and there was one attack against VC in the open. The C-47 flareships (Moonshine) expended 584 flares in support of seven ground attacks. <sup>36/</sup>

The sharply increased B-52 raids beginning in early May were credited with assisting in preventing the enemy from massing against Saigon. The VC were caught in a partial dilemma in that large forces and supplies were needed to penetrate friendly defenses, but these concentrations, in turn,

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were susceptible to heavy losses from airpower and artillery. In the period from 5 May until 30 June, a total of 997 B-52 sorties were flown within 40 kilometers of downtown Saigon. An example of the increased effort occurred during the period 14 to 21 June, when over 60 percent of the total ARC LIGHT effort was directed into the 40 kilometer box. Pre-strike intelligence identified numerous active rocket sites, ammunition supply points, base camps, storage areas, and heavy troop concentrations.<sup>37/</sup>

For the most part, the Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA) in the jungle areas was not spectacular, except in those few cases where a ground sweep by an Army unit was conducted. On the rare occasions when this occurred, the results were most gratifying. If ground sweeps were not made, the enemy had a chance to "police up" the target area. FAC BDA was limited to what the FAC could see in the area cleared by the bomb blast, which generally was not apparent under the heavy jungle canopy. Furthermore, in areas of massive strikes - such as during the week of 14 to 21 June - BDA was next to impossible due to the churning effect of the ordnance.<sup>38/</sup>

III Corps, as a whole, received sharply increased B-52 sorties during the first half of 1968. The following reflects a comparison of ARC LIGHT usage in III Corps:<sup>39/</sup>

<u>1 August 1967-31 December 1967</u>		<u>1 January 1968-30 June 1968</u>	
<u>Targets Struck</u>	<u>Sorties</u>	<u>Targets Struck</u>	<u>Sorties</u>
88	531	299	1,797

TOTAL RESULTS AS RECORDED BY  
 HEADQUARTERS, CAPITAL MILITARY DISTRICT  
 FOR THE PERIOD 050400-130600 MAY 1968

UNIT	5th RGR GP	ARVN GEN RES BNS	US BNS	RF	PP	TOTAL
Killed in Action	23	59	76	5	3	166
Wounded in Action	132	190	338	37	27	724
Missing in Action	3	8	1	0	5	17
Ind Weapons Losses	3	11	1	0	0	15
VC KIA (Body Count)	510	535	1941	56	16	3058
VC KIA (Possible)	35	0	0	16	2	53
Prisoners of War	74	86	51	4	6	221
Detainees	8	137	6	23	0	174
Individual Weapons	78	152	224	8	8	470
Crew Served Weapons	56	45	7	3	1	112
Ammunition	605	18188	24500	1504	3	44800
Mines	3	0	0	0	0	3
Grenades	113	108	119	66	0	406
Bunkers	0	0	5	6	0	11
Sampans	0	0	10	1	2	13
Pounds of rice	0	0	800	800	0	1600
Chieu Hoi	0	0	0	2	3	5

FIGURE 7

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The confirmed KBA for the time period of heightened activity from 3 to 9 May rose sharply in III Corps, reaching a total of 285 accredited to the USAF and VNAF, plus 437 more KBA were recorded by the end of the month. <sup>40/</sup> These figures were over twice the normal KBA reached in the previous three months.

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CHAPTER V

DAMAGE

MACV field evaluators, after air and ground observation, estimated 10,000 houses destroyed in Saigon as a result of the May Offensive. Estimates from other sources went as high as 13,000 houses destroyed or damaged. The destruction was most severe in Precinct 8, in the southwestern corner of the city, and the neighboring Precincts 6 and 7.<sup>1/</sup>

News media assigned the bulk of the destruction to airstrikes, artillery, and fires, creating a controversy over whether the military success of the fire support compensated for the inevitable anger generated in the civilian populace. Residents of the precincts suffering the heaviest losses were interviewed by newsmen and credited the pilots with deadly accuracy. "They fired very precisely against the Viet Cong, they kill a lot of them, I saw them die. The American bombs were also very precise. They landed right where the VC were hiding."<sup>2/</sup>

The VC chose, in many cases, the better constructed homes for refuge or for launching attacks. For example, an entire street of 115 cement block homes in the Cholon section had been recently built with American supplied material. The difference between those houses and ones adjacent was quite pronounced. The new houses had better walls and the floors were thicker. The VC occupied these structures early in the fighting and, less than an hour after the initial bombing started, every home was uninhabitable, with many completely destroyed and the rest badly damaged.<sup>3/</sup>

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The latest scars on Cholon could not be blamed totally on fire supporting arms. If unable to provoke destruction by allied forces, the enemy initiated conflagrations. Eye witnesses who owned houses in many of the burned out areas reported they saw the enemy move in carrying rags and tins of kerosene and deliberately set fire to the houses. They would set fire to one of the more flimsily-built structures, the fire would spread and, in some cases, a hundred houses burned down.<sup>4/</sup>

An uncontrollable factor that added significantly to the heavy destruction in the city was the unusually high winds, which greatly enlarged damage by fire. For example, the VC were embedded in a particular building south of the Saigon River and could not be dislodged. An airstrike directed by the Chief of Police was brought in and the resulting fire was spread across the street by high winds, burning out houses not occupied by the enemy. The Chief of Police said the airstrike was "absolutely necessary" because of the thick walls of the buildings, which were resistant to other types of supporting arms.<sup>5/</sup>

Certainly contributing to the adverse reaction to aerial-delivered ordnance was the short round incident which occurred on 2 June 1968. In Cholon, four and one-half kilometers southwest of the Saigon Presidential Palace, a group of high-ranking Vietnamese officials were visiting the scene of a small VC assault to personally observe the action. A rocket round, fired by a helicopter assigned to the U.S. Army 120th Assault Helicopter Company, impacted on the group. When the rubble was cleared, six of the officials were dead and four wounded.<sup>6/</sup> Among those killed was

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Lt Col Nguyen Van Luan, the Police Chief of Saigon, an able and highly respected officer.

In a U.S. Army analysis of the May Offensive, the use of Light Fire Teams was, more often than not, ineffective for support in built-up or populated areas. The Army report concluded that the most effective support for urban fighting was the utilization of tactical fixed wing aircraft delivering large bombs and napalm. Also, it stated, that tactical air was not utilized to the extent available as the Vietnamese were reluctant to permit the destruction of homes, factories, and public buildings.<sup>7/</sup>

Further emphasizing the requirement for air-delivered ordnance, in an After Action Report, the 3d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, reported that:<sup>8/</sup>

*"In the application of firepower, all elements of the Division, the U.S. Air Force, and supporting aviation showed maximum restraint. The tactical movement of troops was such that the Commanding General, 9th Infantry Division, himself observed on two occasions that the maneuver employed actually was done in a manner which may have caused more U.S. casualties rather than allow weapons fire to enter the city of Saigon. During the period of the battle, the U.S. Air Force dropped 202 bombs, of which 33% were napalm. The bombing was limited to the outskirts of the built-up area, and to areas where the VC were dug in and U.S. troops were receiving mortar, small arms, and machinegun fire. When VC fire could not be countered with divisional resources, it was necessary to call on the use of the Air Force. The Air Force support in many cases was the key to breaking down the resistance of the enemy, and without this support the loss of lives would have been much greater."*

Testifying to the need for heavy ordnance and to the ability of fixed wing aircraft to operate in an urban environment, a FAC in the CMD, who

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directed airstrikes during the May Offensive, stated:<sup>9/</sup>

*"The VC were located primarily in a large concrete building which was about 100 meters north of the friendlies location. There were smaller and less substantial homes around. This was the main structure in the area. There were quite a number of other structures around that the ground commander told me he didn't want destroyed. The area he gave me to hit was approximately 100 meters long and 50 meters wide. The A-1s overhead had ordnance of 250 pound bombs and 20mm, and I pointed out the targets to the A-11s and put in a rocket to mark the target for them. They came in and hit the target and did a very good job of hitting the target and did not drop any ordnance that hit other structures."*

This experience was early during the fighting and the 250 pound bombs were not effective against concrete structures. Although the strikes were right on target, the structure was resistant and these first sorties only succeeded in dropping the roof. The next set of fighters on the scene were F-100s with 500-pound high drag bombs and napalm. The napalm was put in first and the ground commander reported that a number of VC had run out of the building and were subsequently shot by allied troops. The 500-pound high drag bombs were put in next and collapsed the building, again causing the VC to evacuate and get shot or captured.<sup>10/</sup>

Commenting on resultant damage to surrounding buildings, the FAC stated:<sup>11/</sup>

*"As far as the airstrikes go, there is some peripheral damage; this can't be avoided; however, in this particular case the ground commander didn't want the structures across the street damaged, and we managed to wipe out houses on one side of the street without doing direct damage to the houses on the other side. I feel sure that if they had any windows, they were broken, but they didn't burn and they weren't knocked down. As a general rule,*

*the high drag bombs are more accurate than the low drag bombs and all the bombs we put in were the high drag type. Napalm is also pretty accurate as far as laying the stuff down, but it is not always effective against every target."*

Refugees

A substantial number of refugees resulted from the May attack in the Saigon area. As of 14 May, figures compiled by Saigon city officials estimate the number of new refugees within the city limits at 103,354. The refugees were housed in temporary camps, schools, and pagodas throughout the city as well as in camps previously established for Tet refugees. The overall government handling of refugees was demonstrably better than during the Tet Offensive. More significant perhaps, was the difference in attitude of the general populace in comparison to that during Tet. The population showed great resiliency in sustaining the psychological pressures that the VC had been attempting to inflict upon the city.<sup>12/</sup> Business went on fairly normally with only the slightest traces of panic and the police had little problem dispersing the curious.<sup>13/</sup>

During the attack on Saigon the National Police displayed a notable amount of courage and professionalism. The entire CMD police force had been on 100 percent alert since 22 April in readiness for a renewal of the Communist offensive. The reaction to the attack was swift and surprising to the enemy, who appeared to rely heavily on the assumption that the police would become confused and either would not react or would prematurely commit their forces to a few areas. One of the primary reasons for police success can be attributed to the large amount of intelligence that was volunteered by the

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civilian populace, evidencing a popular appreciation for the police and their efforts which, heretofore, had not been apparent. <sup>14/</sup>

With the staggering amount of refugees piling up in Saigon, it was again, as in Tet, dramatically clear that the Communists were oblivious to the wanton destruction their attacks caused in the city. To alleviate suffering as rapidly as possible, a massive rebuilding program was launched immediately following the May attack. Both American and Vietnamese resources were poured into the project.

Review:

On 13 May, COMUSMACV convened a meeting to review the Saigon situation. COMUSMACV stated that the Chief of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff was in possession of enemy documents that revealed that VC/NVA tactics for urban areas involved getting into heavily populated areas and provoking widespread destruction by U.S. and ARVN forces. This, in turn, would create large numbers of refugees. Follow-on enemy efforts were then designed to create discontent among the refugees through exploiting the theme that the US/ARVN were responsible for their plight--with the end goal of prompting the public uprising that they failed to achieve during their Tet Offensive. <sup>15/</sup>

The discussion focused on the need to develop better means for overall control of friendly firepower to negate the enemy's designed tactics of causing wide-scale destruction in the urban areas. COMUSMACV was concerned that allegations from various sources of indiscriminate use of tactical air and gunships in the Saigon area, such as excessive use of air-delivered weapons to

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root out minimum numbers of VC/NVA, were creating damaging effects. <sup>16/</sup>

Responding to COMUSMACV's direction, a question and answer session was conducted by MACV IG with the 9th U.S. Division Commander and his representatives. The following questions were posed: <sup>17/</sup>

- Q: *"If you had a Battalion Commander on the ground and he wanted to get some kind of fire (airstrikes). To get a clearance for that, what was his channel?"*
- A: *"Now when we got the request for an airstrike, my rear CP, since it was in the CMD, would go to CMD to get the clearance to bring in the airstrike."*
- Q: *"From the Vietnamese side, how did they get information in terms of getting a clearance for this?"*
- A: *"Through the 8th MP District. I would assume Colonel Jom went to the 8th MP section and he went one step down to insure this in effect was needed."*
- Q: *"Were there any occasions where there were requests for fires and the request was turned down?"*
- A: *"Yes."*
- Q: *"Is there any occurrence where there was a request for fire support and clearance there was some restrictions put on them?"*
- A: *"We gave them the exact six digit coordinates where we were going to put it. When they came back they just assumed my people were bright enough to put the airstrike exactly where we asked for it. We had to go back up to the Battalion Commander in most cases. In fact, pinpointed the thing with six digit coordinates, so when they approved an airstrike for us everyone of these airstrikes in this area was approved by CMD."*
- Q: *"When you ask for a clearance you base this on a precise six digit coordinate. What is your understanding about the latitude of action you have in adjusting the fire?"*
- A: *"We can adjust the fire, for example, on an airstrike you usually have two to four passes. You have a Battalion Commander up and a man on the ground. All in*

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communication with one another. If the initial coordinates are not exactly where they want it, then they will adjust it.

Q: "How about laterally, as far as your moving it?"

A: "We can't move it away from that set of coordinates. There can always be slippage between that we think is 896427 (example) and where that guy on the ground is at that moment when that airstrike shows up.

Q: "Can you define that for us. How much latitude do you have once you get a clearance to hit a particular set of coordinates. Say the target moves 100 meters, can you still hit it?"

A: "Yes.

Q: "If it moves 500 meters can you still hit it?"

A: "No.

Q: "What is the cut off?"

A: "I don't think there is any specific cut off point.

Q: "The general subject we were discussing. Is that covered by any particular 9th Division regulation or SOP?"

A: "Yes, sir.

Q: "Are you provided with any regulation from CMD?"

A: "Not as such, not their Rules of Engagement. They get into the engagement sequence by holding up their permission for us to being in an airstrike until they are satisfied that the strike is necessary.

Q: "On the description of this area, did you notice any fires produced?"

A: "Yes, in fact on the 9th (of May), the Battalion Commander was the one who noticed the action when they brought in an airstrike or gunship. They said they hit a building and it exploded and kept on exploding."

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Photo Reconnaissance of Damage in Saigon

Various sources have pointed out the dangers of using airpower against urban guerrillas. As noted earlier, it was difficult, if not impossible, to separate the damage caused by ground supporting fire, aerial delivered ordnance, and deliberate destruction initiated by the VC. A review and compilation of the Combat Mission Report Logs for the period 5-31 May show that USAF air-strikes, though hitting in built-up areas, generally struck on the outskirts of Saigon, with most sorties being put in west of the city and south of the Saigon River. The bulk of VNAF strikes were north of Tan Son Nhut with a few in the heart of the city along Plantation Road and a pagoda west of Phu Tho Racetrack (Fig. 8 and 9.)

Figures 9-21 graphically portray the areas in and around Saigon which were destroyed or damaged and had at least one fixed wing airstrike during the May Offensive. The approximate number of strikes is depicted on the Strike Plot Map (Fig. 8) and general observations precede each photograph. Again, it was not possible to ascribe depicted damage to a specific cause. The numbers on the pictures are keyed to the numbered blocks on the Plot Map. All the photos, oriented north and south, were taken on 19 May and the scale is 1:3000.<sup>18/</sup>

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# STRIKE PLOT MAP SAIGON

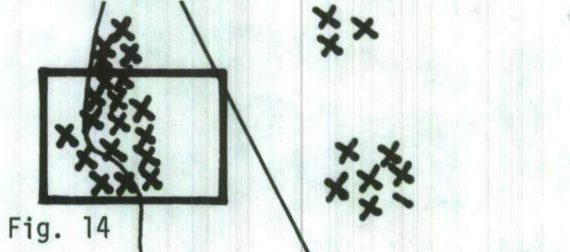


Fig. 14



Fig. 19

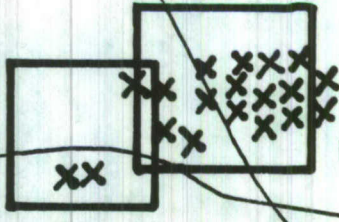


Fig. 12

Fig. 13

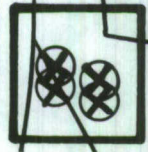


Fig. 15

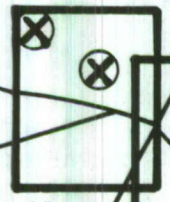


Fig. 11

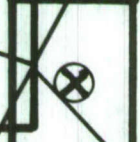


Fig. 10

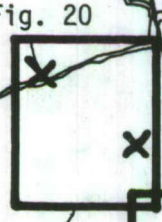


Fig. 20

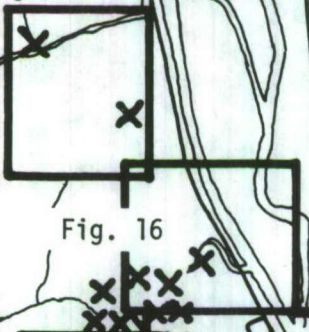


Fig. 16



Fig. 21

Fig. 17

CHANH HUNG

SAIGON

⊗-VNAF  
X-USAF



Fig. 18

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FIGURE 8

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STRIKE PLOT MAP

NHI BINH

TAM BINH XA

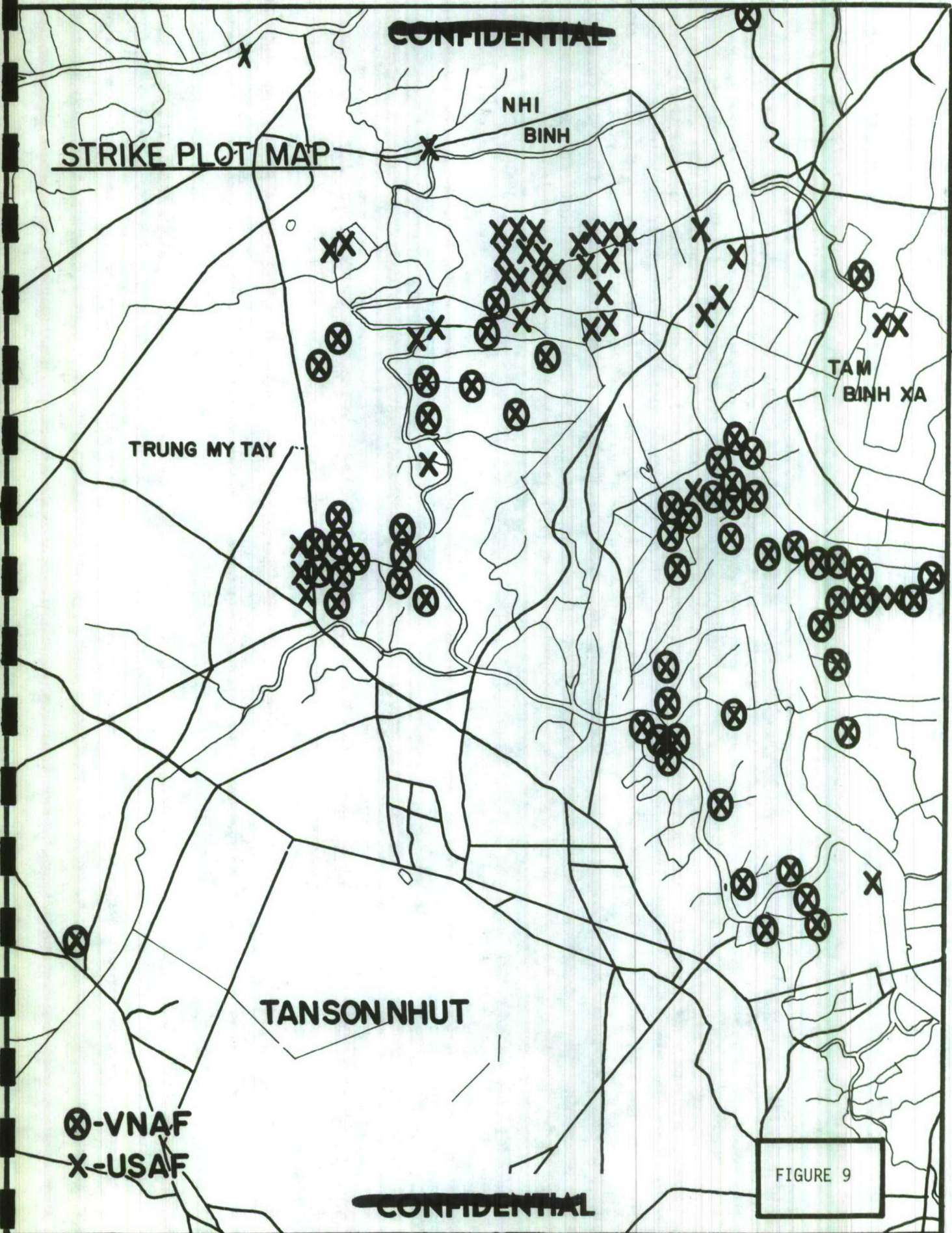
TRUNG MY TAY

TANSON NHUT

⊗-VNAF  
X-USAF

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FIGURE 9



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BASE EXCHANGE

TSN MAIN ROAD

RADAR DOME

RADAR DOME

CEMETARY

POST-STRIKE PHOTO OF VNAF AIRSTRIKE  
NEAR TAN SON NHUT ON FIRST DAY OF  
OFFENSIVE. MAJOR DAMAGE TO WEST OF  
CEMETARY.

Figure 10

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POST-STRIKE PHOTO OF VNAF STRIKE WEST OF PLANTATION ROAD. DAMAGE APPEARS EXTREMELY SELECTIVE WITH PRACTICALLY NO DAMAGE NORTH OF THE ROAD. LACK OF CRATERS INDICATES USE OF SOFT ORDNANCE.

Figure 11

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USAF Strike Damage in Hamlet Area  
Adjacent to Saigon. Crater Proximity  
to Roads Indicates Pin Point Bombing  
and Damage Limitation. Exception  
Noted Below.

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The Triangle Around the National  
Police Station Formed a Defensive  
Wall. Early in the Conflict, Two  
VNAF Sorties Inadvertently Placed  
Three 2,000 Pound Bombs in the  
Immediate Vicinity of the Triangle  
Which Destroyed the Facility as a  
Defensive Position and Wounded  
Many of the Police. As of mid-  
August, the Station Was Still Un-  
occupied.

National Police Station



Figure 12

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National Police Station

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Continuation of Airstrike Damage  
in Hamlet Shown in Figure 12.

Figure 13

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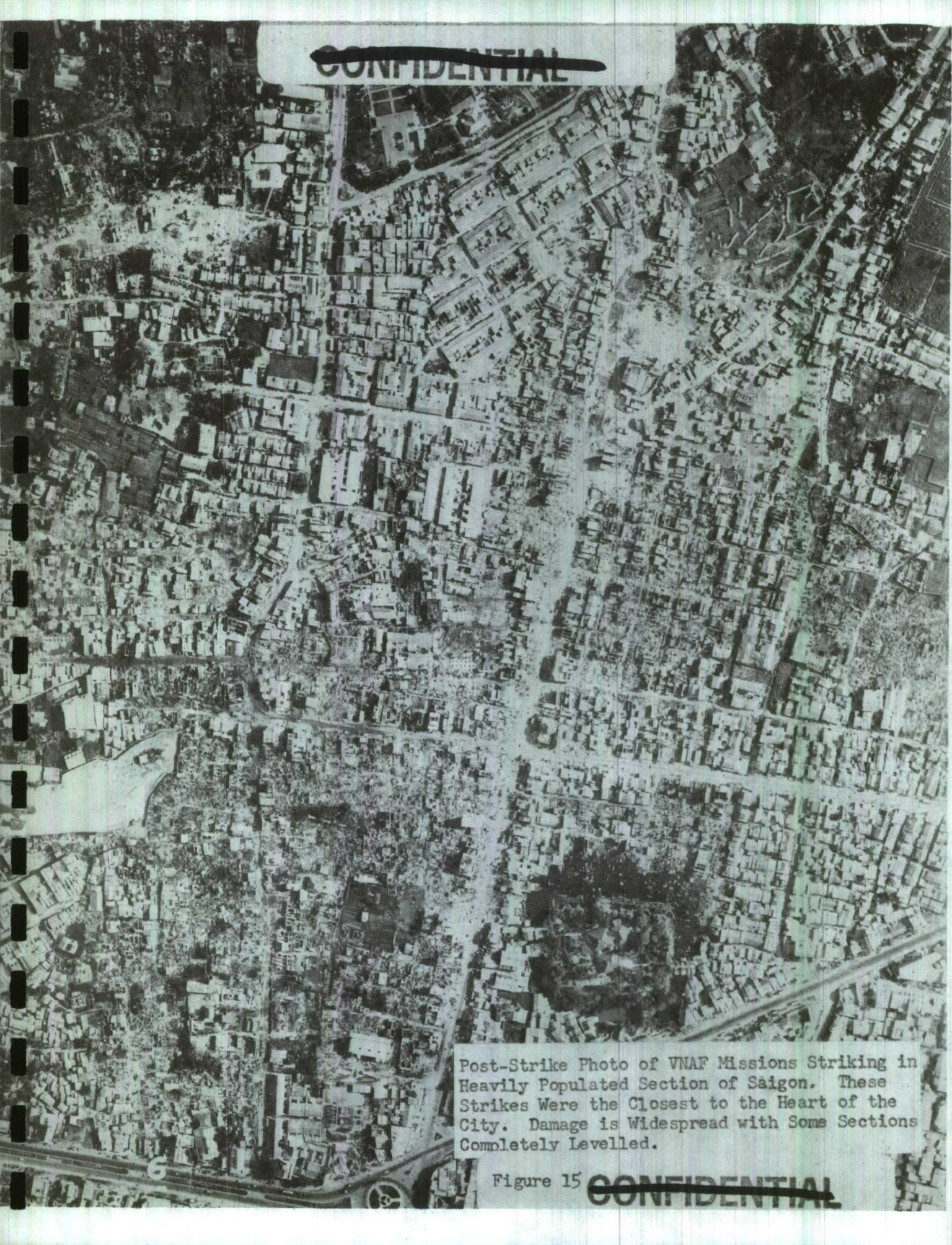


Heaviest Concentration of USAF Airstrikes During the May Offensive Against Saigon. Craters are Clustered and are Mostly North of the Road. Selectivity of Tactical Air is Apparent; Structure Destruction is Almost Total.

Figure 14

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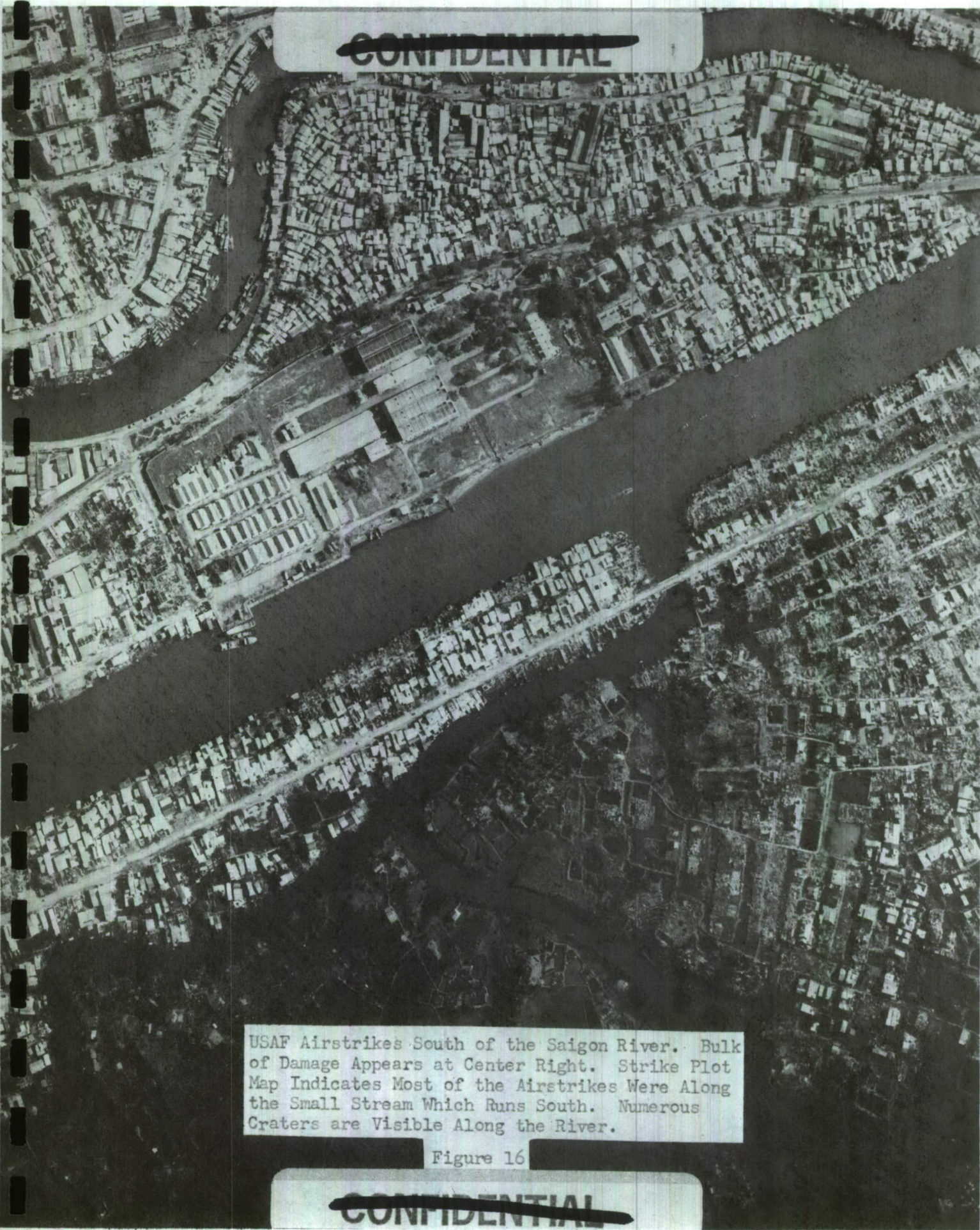


Post-Strike Photo of VNAF Missions Striking in Heavily Populated Section of Saigon. These Strikes Were the Closest to the Heart of the City. Damage is Widespread with Some Sections Completely Levelled.

Figure 15

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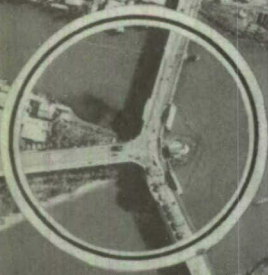
USAF Airstrikes South of the Saigon River. Bulk of Damage Appears at Center Right. Strike Plot Map Indicates Most of the Airstrikes Were Along the Small Stream Which Runs South. Numerous Craters are Visible Along the River.

Figure 16

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"Y" BRIDGE



The "Y" Bridge Was Scene of Heavy Fighting During the May Offensive. USAF Strike Near the River Upper Right. Multiple Airstrikes Made in Lower Left Area with Several Large Craters Visible.

Figure 17

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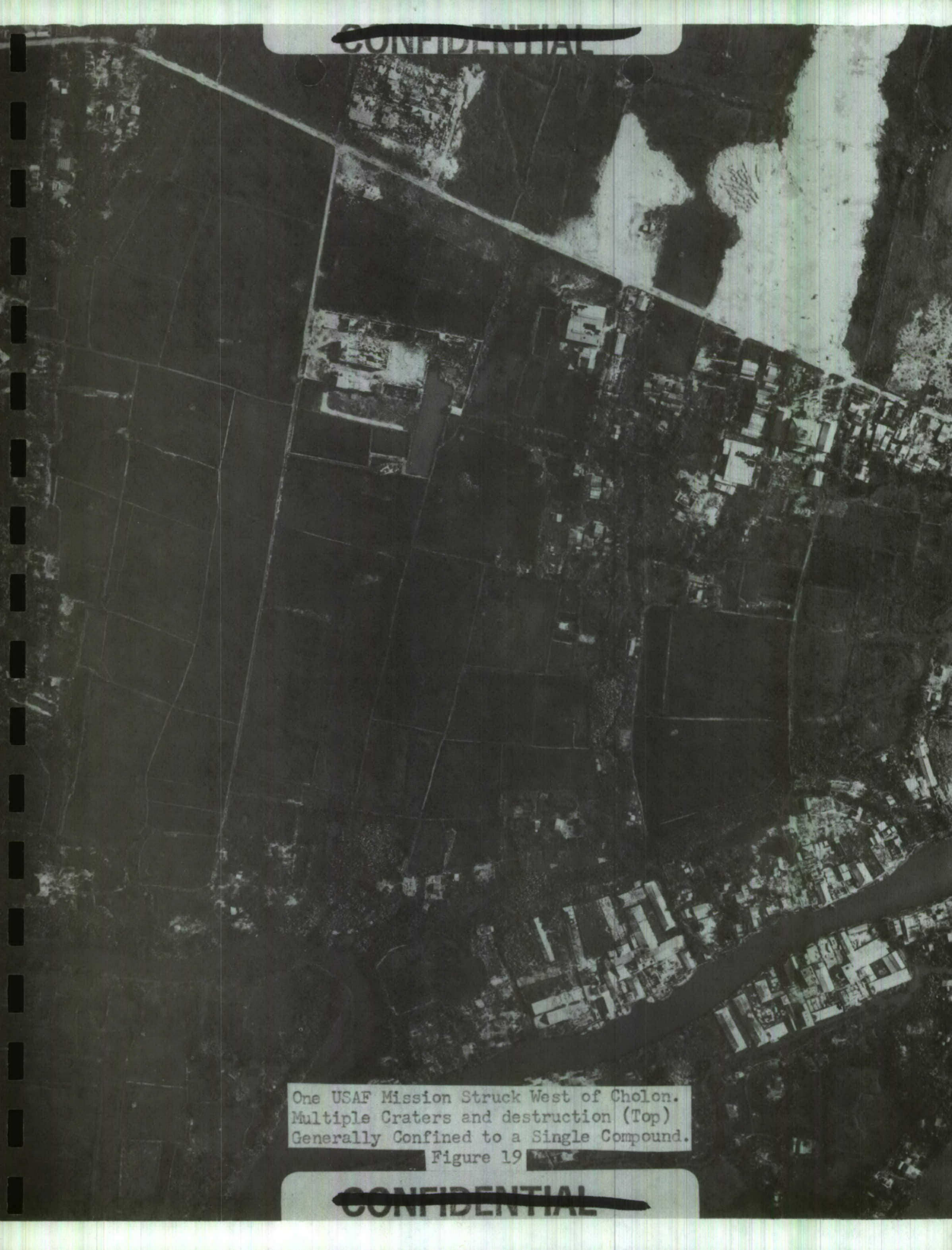


TWO USAF SORTIES STRUCK JUST SOUTH  
OF THE CANAL

Figure 18

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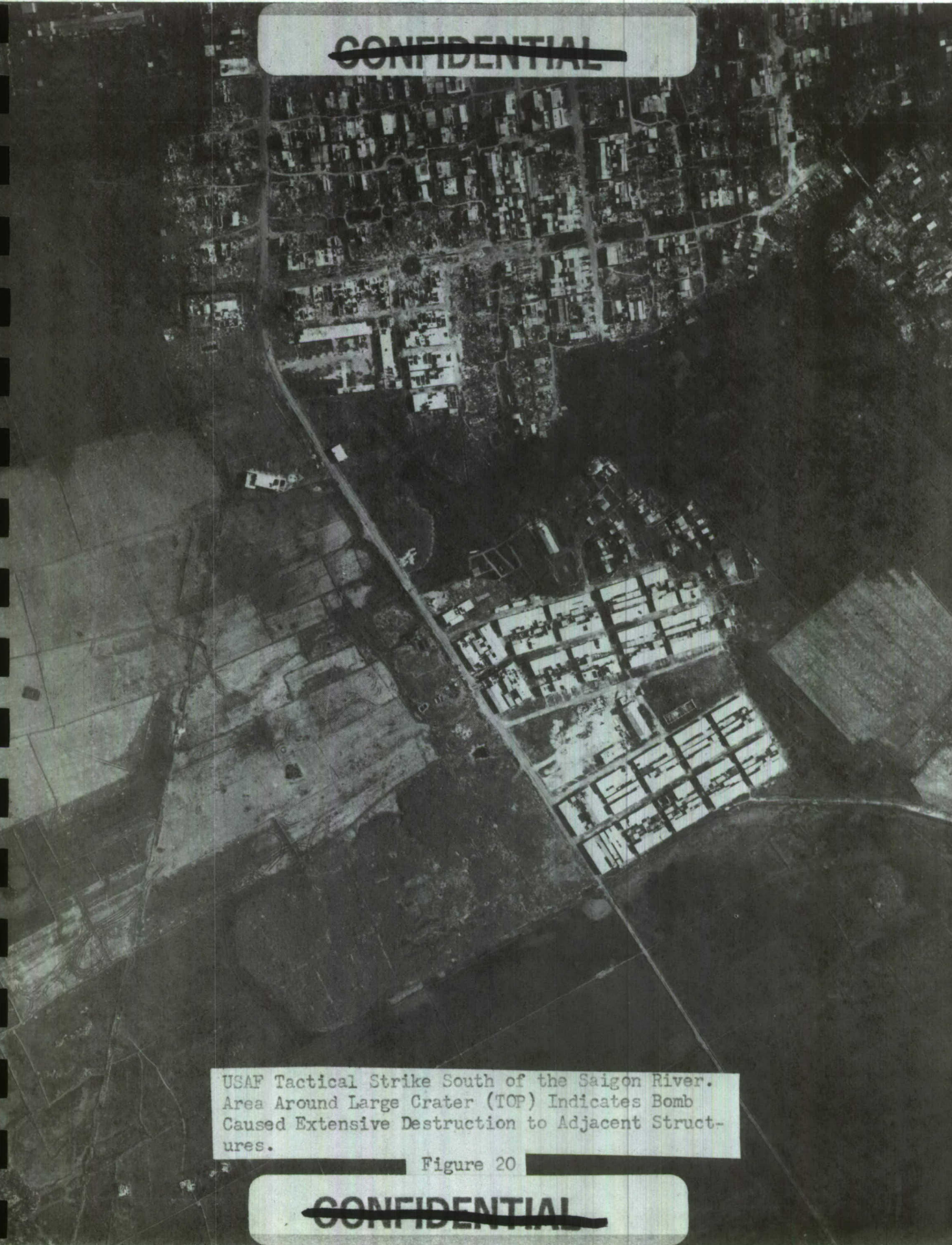


One USAF Mission Struck West of Cholon.  
Multiple Craters and destruction (Top)  
Generally Confined to a Single Compound.

Figure 19

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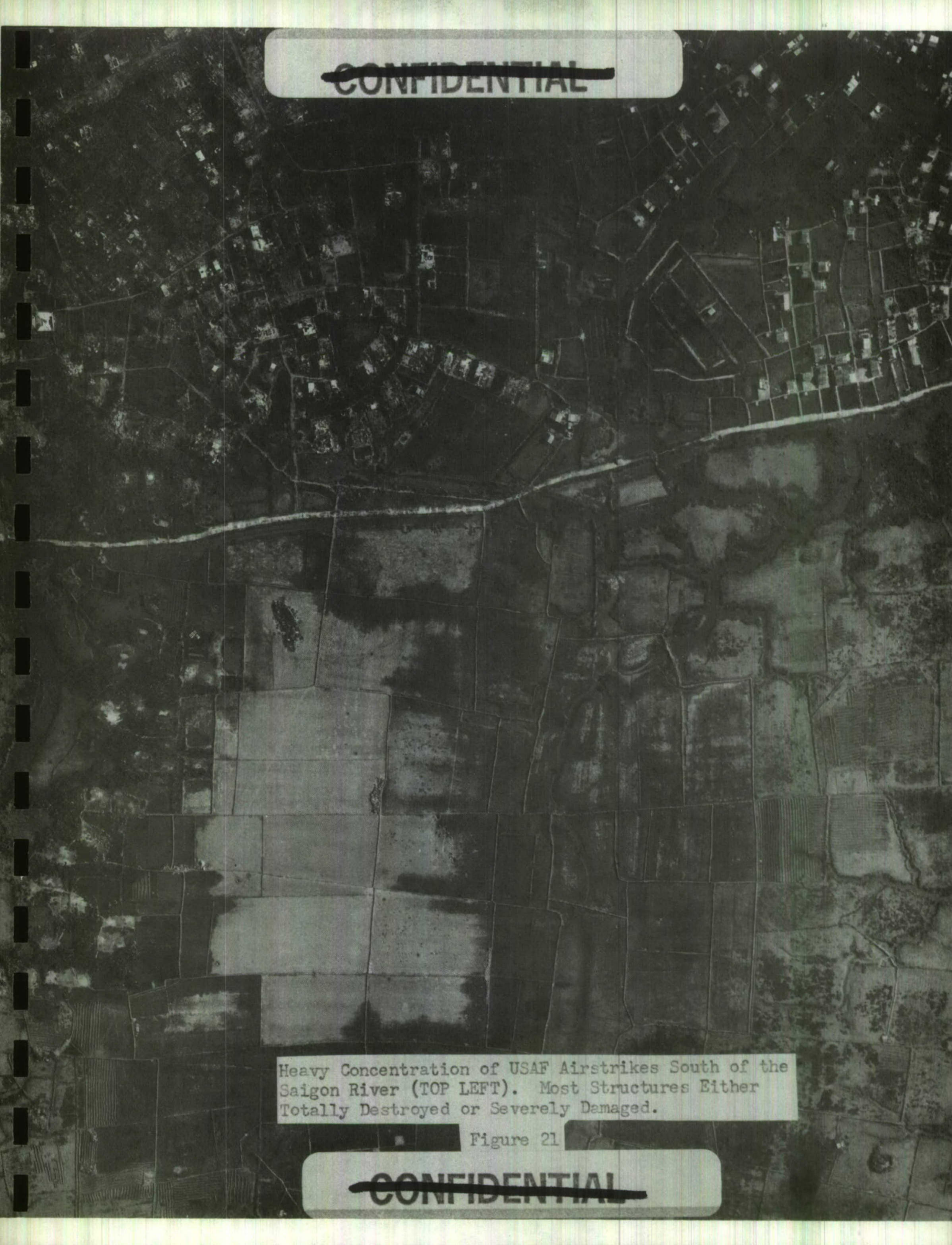


USAF Tactical Strike South of the Saigon River.  
Area Around Large Crater (TOP) Indicates Bomb  
Caused Extensive Destruction to Adjacent Structures.

Figure 20

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Heavy Concentration of USAF Airstrikes South of the Saigon River (TOP LEFT). Most Structures Either Totally Destroyed or Severely Damaged.

Figure 21

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CHAPTER VI

CAPITAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND

The Capital Military District (CMD) was not organized to defend against attacks of the magnitude that occurred between late January and early May. Until reorganization, the CMD had various U.S. Army and ARVN areas of operation with each being an entity unto itself, loosely joined by the CMD headquarters located in downtown Saigon. Prior to reorganization, the senior U.S. representative was an Army colonel in the capacity of Advisor.

Consequently, on 4 June, COMUSMACV established a II Field Force Forward Headquarters in Saigon and designated the Deputy CG, II FFV, as the Commander as well as the Senior Advisor to the Military Governor of Saigon. Emphasizing the permanence of the organization and the vital role it played in the defense of Saigon, COMUSMACV redesignated II FFV Forward the Capital Military Assistance Command (CMAC). Further, in early August, a U.S. Army major general was appointed as the CMAC Commander vice the Deputy CG, II FFV. On the RVNAF side, the Saigon Military Governor was appointed the CG, CMD, and established concurrently under CG, III Corps.<sup>1/</sup>

The CG CMAC had operational control for security over all U.S. Military Advisors and National Police Advisors in the Saigon/Gia Dinh/Cholon area. He also had operational control over designated brigade and battalion-size maneuver units, artillery, and air cavalry elements. The U.S. and RVN commands were closely coordinated through collocated command headquarters and staffs plus an integrated Tactical Operations Center (TOC).<sup>2/</sup>

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The relationship between CG CMAC and U.S. Divisions plus other forces in III Corps was that of subordinate commanders under CG II FFV. Additionally, CG CMAC coordinated directly with other II FFV elements regarding their operations proposed to them by CG CMD in areas outside the CMD. The specific mission of CMAC was identified as:<sup>3/</sup>

- Exercise operational control of designated units in the defense of Saigon and of a specified area within the CMD.
- Provide surveillance and countermeasures to prevent rocket and mortar attacks on Saigon.
- Advise and assist the Saigon Military Governor and Commanding General, CMD, with particular emphasis on providing for the effective defense of Saigon.
- Direct U.S. Advisors to ARVN, Regional and Popular Forces, and National Police Forces in security matters.

CMAC was specifically tasked to "exercise assigned authority for MACV in employment of air and artillery within Saigon built-up areas". The organizational charts of CMAC are shown in Figures 22 and 23.<sup>4/</sup> Note that the Staff Directory shown in Figure 22 does not depict the command and control relationship of the CMAC Air Liaison Officer (ALO). This facet will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

#### ALO/FAC Reorganization

In concert with centralized control and effective support of the expanded mission, the USAF reorganized its ALO and FAC support. Previously, the ALO for the CMD divided his time between his organization at Tan Son Nhut and the CMD Headquarters where he acted as advisor to the ARVN and the CMD staff. A

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UNCLASSIFIED

AUGUST 1968

HEADQUARTERS CAPITAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND

STAFF DIRECTORY

SAIGON RVN

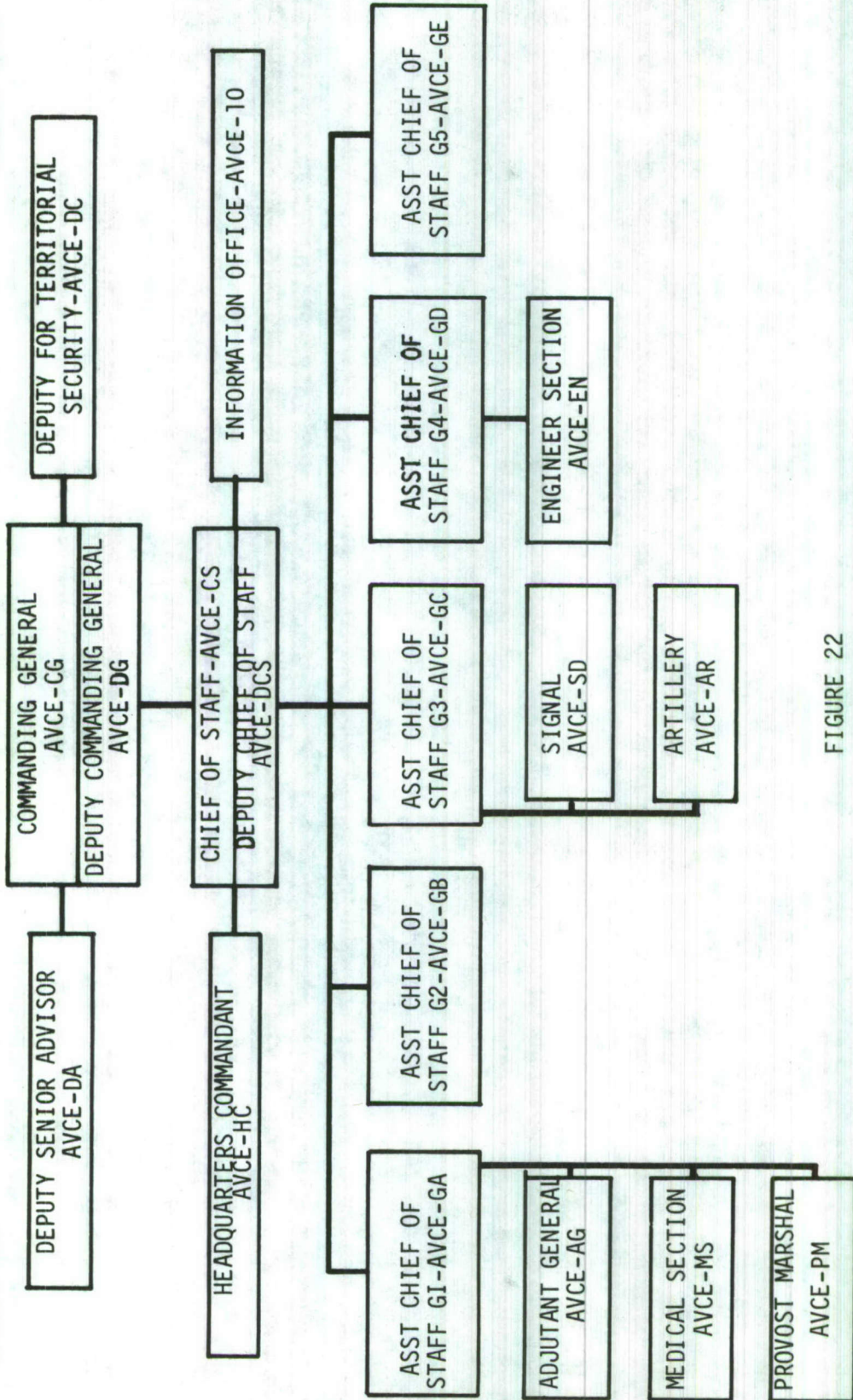


FIGURE 22

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CAPITAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND (PROV)

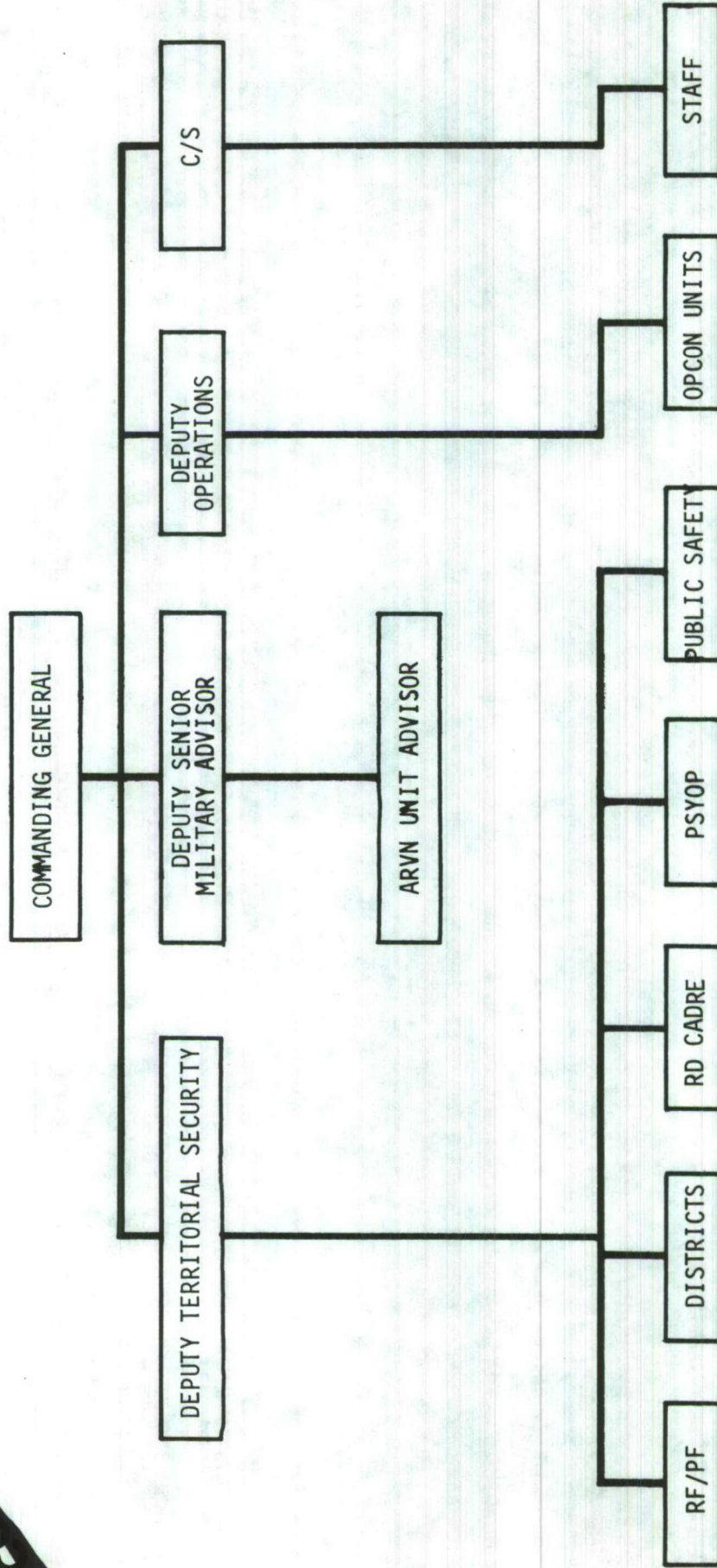


FIGURE 23

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full-time ALO was assigned to CMAC on 10 June and an Assistant ALO was posted in July. Complementing the ALO capability at CMAC was the increase in FACs and aircraft directly responsive to CMD requirements. As of 9 August, 15 FAC aircraft (0-1s and 0-2s), 29 pilots and eight navigators were dedicated to the defense of Saigon.<sup>5/</sup>

Commenting on the flexibility and enhanced command and control, the CMAC ALO stated:<sup>6/</sup>

*"With ground units having a centralized control and the attached units who support them coming under the same headquarters, we have much more flexibility and our responsiveness has increased tremendously. The backbone of setting up this organization depends on a first class communications system. This system was set up. We now have communications by landline, FM, UHF, and HF radio. Each system has at least one back-up system. This insures us constant communication at all times as long as we have power and this is backed up with emergency generators."*

### Increased Capability

By August, a greatly increased amount of men and equipment in the CMD was engaged in preventing enemy ground and fire attacks. In the CMD, 450 separate units ranging from squad-size to company-size were conducting patrols and ambushes. Moreover, various technical devices were installed throughout the area:<sup>7/</sup>

Watch Towers - ringing the city and equipped with plotting boards, linked communications, plus triangulation and azimuth computers.

Sensors - seismographic, infrared, and "people sniffers" were seeded within the CMD by ground troops.

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Ground Surveillance Radars - emplaced to the south and west of Saigon to detect movement at night.

Counter Mortar Batteries - located strategically within the CMD. A total of four on Tan Son Nhut.

Rocket Watch - a combination of armed helicopters and FAC/Spooky aircraft in specified corridors nightly.

### Rocket Watch

A mortar round fell in the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy on 5 May, starting a series of rocket/mortar attacks that was to last until 21 June. During that 48-day period, rockets or mortars fell on the city on all but 19 days (Appendix 1). A total of 173 rockets, 215 mortar rounds, and nine unknown firings pounded the city during that span, causing widespread terror and destruction.<sup>8/</sup>

Based on high-level interest in regard to the damaging effects of the rocket/mortar fire in and around Saigon, DIA requested MACV provide a detailed assessment of damage inflicted in the Saigon area during the series of fire attacks which commenced on 5 May. On 30 June, MACV updated their earlier figure to 13,830 houses destroyed in Saigon during the May Offensive and subsequent fire attacks, with 6,592 homes heavily damaged or destroyed in neighboring Gia Dinh. A total of 599 Saigon/Gia Dinh civilians were killed and 5,657 wounded. There were 164,884 persons in Saigon/Gia Dinh refugee camps, of which 10,209 were refugees remaining from the Tet Offensive.<sup>9/</sup>

COMUSMACV publicly stated that the rocket/mortar terror attacks were going to be stopped. He further stated that the allies had the means and the

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will to prevent the random rocketing of Saigon and its adjacent military installations. The troop increase and the technical devices had been introduced; however, one of the means--Rocket Watch--was an Air Force role and will be traced in greater detail.

After the onset of the rocket attacks on Saigon and Tan Son Nhut in February, a Rocket Watch was initiated using the then limited resources of the FAC elements in the CMD. Initially, the various FAC units divided the workload of flying the night watch according to their manning and capability.

By 11 June, a more formal and controlled night Rocket Watch program went into effect. Four corridors were established around Saigon at the cardinal points to box in the city. The north corridor, after extensive experimentation, was assigned to USAF and established as 7 x 14 kilometers-- the long axis running east-west. The other three corridors were the responsibility of U.S. Army helicopter gunships. The north corridor had a bottom of 3,000 feet to allow artillery to fire through the area, but above 3,000 feet and within the corridor boundaries, USAF pilots were guaranteed artillery clearance. Furthermore, during periods of inclement weather, the USAF crews could move their orbit point southward to the southern portion of the city, still with artillery clearance. This flexibility of orbit did not hinder ground batteries as their rules of fire precluded firing artillery rounds across the city. <sup>10/</sup>

The CG CMAC assigned the helicopter gunship duty officer the responsibility of assuming all the decisions affecting the Rocket Watch areas and coverage.

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The duty officer was also accountable for the necessary coordination between the ground stations and all the Rocket Watch aircraft. This arrangement not only centralized control, but had the added advantage of freeing an Air Force duty officer.<sup>11/</sup>

The Commander, 7AF, approved the use of O-2 aircraft exclusively for the CMAC Rocket Watch on 21 June. Aircraft and crews moved to Bien Hoa AB, set up operations, received local check-outs, and went into full operation by 27 June.<sup>12/</sup>

Several changes in operating procedures occurred during June and July out of which evolved the nightly posture. However, the time of coverage remained constant, from 1900 to 0700. In the early stages, the O-1 crews flew from 1900 to 2130 when they were relieved on station by two O-2s. The O-2s would subsequently be replaced on station by other O-2s until 0700. The north corridor was patrolled by one O-2 while the other ranged over the remaining three corridors as required to cover the highest threat area.<sup>13/</sup>

On 21 July, a meeting of Army and USAF senior staff officers and the CG CMAC was held at CMAC headquarters to discuss Rocket Watch procedures. The USAF proposed having a single O-2 provide nightly coverage in the north corridor, thus freeing the O-1s from Rocket Watch duty and thereby reducing the overall O-1 commitment to an acceptable level. The USAF position was that the single O-2 could provide adequate coverage of the north corridor and the O-2 sorties freed from Rocket Watch duty could be used to VR the infiltration routes in III Corps in conjunction with Tropic Moon aircraft

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(A-1s equipped with low light level TV). The CG CMAC agreed to the proposal on a test basis only, the stipulation being that if the coverage was degraded in any way by the absence of the second FAC, the original plan would be re-instated. Single FAC coverage was promulgated on 22 July and, as of 15 August, the results were satisfactory. It must be noted, however, that <sup>14/</sup> Saigon was not struck by mortars/rockets during that period.

Completing the USAF team in the north corridor was a Spooky, which appeared on station at the beginning of the Rocket Watch and flew from 1930 to 0630. In constant contact with both the ground controlling agencies and the FAC, Spooky provided immediate firepower as well as increased visual coverage. Spooky and the FAC coordinated very closely in the small 7 x 14 km box with Spooky holding at approximately 3,700 feet and the FAC at 3,000 feet; each generally having the other in sight. Ancillary benefits accrued as a result of an airborne Spooky just north of Tan Son Nhut. The most obvious was the ability to react rapidly on the air base, while still on call to incursions anywhere within the CMD. <sup>15/</sup>

In late August, the system was again modified. The Air Force assumed the responsibility for the eastern corridor as well as the northern one; therefore, two O-2s were airborne from 1900 to 0700 covering north and east of the city and the night VR was dropped. Further, the size of the north corridor was enlarged and the east corridor was redesigned to follow natural topographic features. <sup>16/</sup>

Complementing the airborne visual watch for rockets was a procedure

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designed to deliver significant and diverse VR sightings to the G-2 and G-3 in the TOC. Special VR requests to check out hot intelligence reports were passed to FACs, who would investigate and report their findings to the TOC. In turn, unusual movement or activity was called in by the FAC to the TOC, who investigated and reported their findings to the FAC. This VR procedure was implemented both day and night.<sup>17/</sup>

The FACs assigned to the Rocket Watch were all SCAR-qualified (Strike Control and Reconnaissance) and were normally not intended to be used for purposes other than directing strikes against active rocket sites. Nonetheless, in emergency situations, it was envisioned that they would direct close air support for friendly troops. The rocket attack procedures were outlined by III DASC as follows:<sup>18/</sup>

- If a rocket launch is observed, immediately advise Saigon Artillery Center on FM, Snap Control (TOC at CMAC) on the VHF.
- Call DEADLY 52 (helicopter gunship) with information.
- Attempt to pinpoint the rocket site and obtain six digit coordinates (100 meters); pass coordinates to, and request clearance to expend, from DEADLY 52. DEADLY 52 will obtain clearance for FACs, SPOOKY, Light Fire Teams, and artillery.
- Do Not expend any ordnance without proper clearance from DEADLY 52.
- Continue to monitor the suspected site. Use extreme caution and look around. Light Fire Teams will be in the area and artillery will engage as soon as possible. VNAF A-1s have been known to expend while USAF is still awaiting clearance.

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Again, do not expend without clearance, use caution, and keep your eyes open.

On 26 July, CMAC published a Clearance of Fires Regulation, Number 525-1, to inform ground commanders of procedures for clearance of fires in the CMD. The CMD Commander was responsible for providing final approval of specified strike zones (areas approved by GVN/RVNAF where artillery, airstrikes, and naval gunfire required military, but not civil, clearance) in his area. Point target clearance, which was defined as six digit coordinates unless otherwise specified, was clearance to fire in the area of a 1,000 meter radius from the requested target coordinates. The Rules of Engagement specified that within the CMD, the maneuver force commander desiring fires was responsible for securing appropriate clearances.<sup>19/</sup>

Definitive and detailed rules were established by CMAC Reg 525-1, outlining procedures for placing artillery fire in the CMD; however, the regulation did not include airstrike control, limitations, or procedures. Therefore, the ground forces had no way of knowing the tactical air capability or restrictions. The CMAC ALO was requested to review and coordinate on the proposed regulation in mid-July. He later commented, "Several pages of suggestions were submitted by myself and the Assistant ALO that were designed to integrate the USAF Rules of Engagement. Unfortunately, none of which appeared in the CMAC regulation."<sup>20/</sup>

To increase the capability of Rocket Watch teams in spotting and marking rocket launch sites, a program was established for artillery to fire "flash tests" on a no notice basis every night. These tests were designed to simulate

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a rocket launch by firing a white phosphorus air burst round on a predetermined set of coordinates. The FACs, Spooky, helicopter gunships, and watch towers were to spot the flash of light, which lasted about a second and a half, convert it to a ground position, and call in the coordinates. Originally, the results were erratic, but the trend soon reflected the value of constant training. By August, the normal error for FACs/Spooky was under 300 meters with a reaction time of 45 seconds from the time the flash appeared. Moreover, the FAC/Spooky plotting problem was much more complex than that confronting watch towers or helicopters for they were moving platforms with constantly shifting reference points.<sup>21/</sup>

#### Rocket Watch Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the Rocket Watch program was difficult to evaluate. Certainly there were no attacks by fire on Saigon since 21 June and the Communist boast of "100 rockets for 100 days" did not occur, but this failure to make good their boast may have been due to a number of reasons. The capture of large rocket/mortar caches discovered in and around the CMD greatly degraded the enemy capability and the ground sweeps kept him off balance. However, it was doubtful whether the munitions interceptions and increased patrols resulted in total cessation. Another possible factor may have been enemy discipline. He was either husbanding his rockets for a massive attack or reacting to the adverse publicity garnered by the indiscriminate rocketing of a heavily-populated city. Even when obviously attacking Tan Son Nhut, a few "short rounds" occurred.

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The CMAC ALO was of the opinion that the Rocket Watch was valuable: <sup>22/</sup>

*"The Rocket Watch, as we are conducting it, is well worth the time and effort expended giving us this air surveillance. There is a by-product of this Rocket Watch. We have constant surveillance of the ground during hours of darkness. The Rocket Watch corridors are set up to be nearly over rocket positions used in the past. These are also the same routes the enemy used moving into the Saigon area. The FACs, SPOOKY, and the helicopters are able to observe movement on the waterways, the roads, the trails; in fact, any movement going on in the area. This side effect, in my opinion, is almost as important as the Rocket Watch itself. The mere fact that these people are there provides a deterrent to the firing of rockets and the movement of the enemy at night."*

Reinforcing the ALO's opinion of the effort, a Rocket Watch FAC displayed his completely thorough knowledge of the north corridor by pointing out prominent landmarks, known friendly locations, villages by name, and frequencies of control agencies without referring to a map or checklist. He further stated his navigator could do the same and he was reasonably sure they could pinpoint a rocket launch within 200 meters. The reason for his estimate being lower than the "flash test" scores was that the "flash test", although providing excellent training, had built-in errors. For example, the artillery fired on a predetermined set of coordinates; however, as the shell was an airburst, there was no definitive method of determining exactly where the flash occurred. Therefore, the desired impact point was used, resulting in errors of up to 100 meters. <sup>23/</sup>

Conversely, a CMD FAC who participated in the Rocket Watch since its inception didn't think it was particularly effective, though it did have some

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usefulness. He commented: <sup>24/</sup>

*"I don't think we can ever prevent the VC from firing rockets, at least the first volley into a base; but at the same time, I have never seen them send up a second volley, at least from the same place. I don't feel the night operation is very effective, but on the other hand, I don't think that Charlie is extremely effective at night either. I think that we are more or less obligated to stay up there whenever there is a risk of a rocket attack.*

*"In some cases we have been able to put in fire and when the friendlies went in the next day, they would find blood traces and equipment lying around."*

#### Problems

The most persistent problem for all supporting fires in the CMD was one of clearances. This barrier prevented efficient and rapid reaction to enemy ground assaults and rocket/mortar fire. During July, approximately one-third of the requests for clearances were approved and executed; the rest were denied by one or more of the clearing agencies. Airstrikes often were cancelled or diverted due to previously granted clearances being rescinded. Specifically, one request was denied on a troops-in-contact mission because friendly troops were in the area. This clearance was finally granted after it was made very clear that the friendly troops had requested the airstrike. Further, an active rocket site was not attacked, even though an Army helicopter was directly over the target--it was deemed too close to a hamlet for clearance purposes. <sup>25/</sup>

Echoing the clearance problems, one FAC stated: <sup>26/</sup>

*"We have had some difficulty getting ground clearance*

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*to hit. One thing that is a problem here, there are so many friendlies in the area up to the north including a Hawk site and they are roaming the area constantly. When you try to get a clearance in this area, the people that clear you have a lot of work to do before they tell you that you can go in."*

An organization established as rapidly as CMAC was destined to have growing pains. As of August, the Army Staff had not integrated the assistance available to it from the ALOs. An example of the CMAC Clearance of Fires Regulation has already been mentioned. Moreover, in early August, CMAC recommended B-52 ARC LIGHT strikes within the CMD. The target nominations went forward to MACV without the CMAC ALO or Assistant ALO having seen or coordinated on the nomination of targets. Coincidentally, the combined experience of the two ALOs totals 17 years in the B-52 program. The ALO commented: "Normally, as the ALO, I find out about things after they have already happened; sometimes asked 'how come you dropped the ball on our plans.'" <sup>27/</sup>

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CHAPTER VII

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Since the beginning of the Communist Spring Offensive, the enemy took every advantage in areas normally considered as non-military, such as churches and pagodas, and installed defensive positions in public and private dwellings. To counter the increased use of this tactic, Deputy COMUSMACV, on 17 February, modified the current Rules of Engagement for artillery, mortar, and naval gunfire in parts of I Corps: <sup>1/</sup>

*"Effective immediately, current Rules of Engagement are modified as contained herein where responsible commanders identify positive enemy hostile acts either in execution or preparation, such responsible commanders are authorized to attack with weapons and forces most appropriate to the circumstances to insure prompt destruction of the enemy...responsible commanders will use every means available to react quickly with maximum firepower to destroy the enemy forces and/or material."*

This interest in the Rules of Engagement and their applicability to the enemy offensive was paralleled by certain actions taken by 7AF relevant to FAC and Spooky Rules of Engagement.

The increase of rocket attacks in the Saigon/Bien Hoa area in mid-February highlighted the problem associated with the process of obtaining clearances for FACs to mark enemy rocket positions with white phosphorus and for Spooky gunships to initiate fire on rocket positions which were in the process of firing against friendly forces and positions. The Rules of Engagement - 7AF Regulation 55-49 - directed that "all targets selected for an airstrike will be approved by the Province Chief directly or through higher ARVN authority." <sup>2/</sup>

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The ability to launch attacks swiftly, without warning and normally during the hours of darkness, worked strongly in the favor of the enemy under the existing rules. Consequently, on 24 February, 7AF modified the Rules of Engagement for FAC and Spooky aircraft in an area encompassed by a 25-kilometer radius from Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut air bases. The amendment authorized:<sup>3/</sup>

- Spooky aircraft to initiate fire on enemy rockets and installations.
- FACs to fire white phosphorus marking rockets on enemy positions which were in the process of firing against friendly forces and installations.

The increased authority charged the FACs and Spooky commanders to keep on board the latest and most up-to-date information on friendly positions to avoid unnecessary risk to allied forces. Seventh Air Force recognized that some risk accrued from the increased authority, but that stopping rocket attacks on friendly troops and installations warranted the slight additional risk incurred. Authority for airstrikes by tactical fighter aircraft without further clearance was not granted and the Rules of Engagement under 7AF Reg 55-49 applied. Further, the Director of III DASC, who controlled the FAC and Spooky aircraft in the Tan Son Nhut/Bien Hoa area, was to report to TACC all firings and results of the local program in determining possible expanded use.<sup>4/</sup>

On 1 March, 7AF reinterpreted the Rules of Engagement for Spooky to apply to all of South Vietnam:<sup>5/</sup>

- Spooky aircraft are authorized to initiate fire

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on enemy rocket/mortar positions which are in the process of firing against friendly forces and installations.

- In the event that ground fire is encountered by the Spooky aircraft while striking, paragraph 71 of 7AFR 55-49 ("Rules of Engagement") applies. "Strike aircraft are authorized to defend themselves against groundfire providing; (1) the source of fire can be visually identified, (2) the strike can be positively oriented against the source, (3) the fire is of such intensity that counteraction is necessary."

The expanded authority obliged FACs and Spooky commanders to use the best information of friendly forces available from controlling DASCs to avoid unnecessary risks to friendly forces. This new directive did not alter the basic rules given III DASC regarding Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut in the 24 February message.<sup>6/</sup>

In mid-April, the Deputy Director of III DASC suggested an A-37 Air Alert/FAC combination with the objective of expending tactical fighters on a timely basis during a rocket attack. He felt that current ground rules negated the capability of tactical fighters as an adequate retaliatory weapons system. To be effective during such an attack, the fighters had to be cleared for immediate ordnance expenditure against the rocket/mortar site. To provide increased firepower for immediate response to rocket attacks and yet operate within the basic framework of the governing Rules of Engagement, the following plan was submitted to 7AF by III DASC.<sup>7/</sup>

- In the event of firm intelligence concerning the date and time of an enemy rocket attack, a flight of two A-37s should be made available for airborne alert. A formation of two aircraft is considered adequate. This formation is easy to handle and two aircraft are capable

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of carrying adequate ordnance to cover the mission.

- A qualified FAC should fly "right seat" in the lead aircraft.
- To obtain required information regarding position of friendly ground troops, artillery fire plans, helicopter fire team status, etc., the FAC, using the FM radio, should establish contact with the appropriate ground commander, Spooky, other FACs, the artillery coordinator, and/or the Army Aviation element, all of whom should be monitoring a pre-briefed tactical FM frequency.
- In the event of a rocket attack, if the FAC is positioned so as to be able to observe the rocket launching, the FAC (lead aircraft) should immediately engage the launch site with heavy ordnance. This ordnance impact will serve as a "mark" for other members of the flight, who can immediately roll in as necessary.
- ...the lead A-37 could be armed with SUU-25 flare dispensers and Mark 24 flares to provide illumination as the FAC deemed necessary...Within the flight, the ordnance load should include CBU-24 and napalm plus rockets. Napalm will also provide a means for working the target.
- For the defense of important military installations such as the Tan Son Nhut complex and the Bien Hoa/Long Binh complex, this proposal, if implemented, will provide both speed and quantity of retaliatory firepower we do not currently possess. Additionally, the A-37s could be employed without Spooky/Moonshine (flaeship) or additional FAC aircraft. Artillery, which could pose a problem in regard to orbit altitudes, can be coordinated with appropriate fire control centers.

The Director, TACC, concurred with the proposal, as FAC and Spooky aircraft in the past retaliated against rocket firing positions; however, their ordnance was limited and offered more harassment than destruction. The effectiveness of bombs delivered immediately after the first rocket firing would not only end the attack, but destroy the rockets and enemy. The fall out psychological impact of this immediate destruction would be an impressive

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deterrent to further attacks.<sup>8/</sup>

As a result of the above proposal, the Rules of Engagement for the 25-kilometer radius of Bien Hoa/Tan Son Nhut were further amended in late April. A-37s with a qualified FAC in the right seat of the lead aircraft were authorized to deliver ordnance on enemy rocket positions which were in the process of firing on friendly forces or installations with the following provisions:<sup>9/</sup>

- The FAC in the lead A-37 will make contact with the appropriate ground commander, Spooky, other FACs, artillery coordinator, all of which should be on the same FM frequency. He should obtain initial clearance into the area and the position of friendly forces.
- The lead A-37's primary duty will be to function as a FAC. The lead A-37 should engage the rocket firing site with a marking rocket. The FAC in the lead A-37 will then clear each A-37 and request adjustments to impact points as usual. Flares may be used as desired.

As a test measure, two flights were flown to exercise the concept; however, no ordnance was expended. All other phases of the operation, i.e., coordination with Spooky, the Dong Nai Sensitive Area and the ground commanders in the local area proved without doubt that the concept would work. Even with such promising results, the increased ground troop posture in the area, coupled with increased clearance sensitivity, caused further flights to be held in abeyance.<sup>10/</sup>

Again, the FACs and Spooky aircraft commanders were directed to keep on board and use the best information on friendly positions from controlling DASCs and TACPs to avoid unnecessary risks to friendly forces. In addition, III

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DASC and TACPs would make an effort to streamline clearance procedures in order to expedite after-the-fact clearances. Authority for placing other tactical airstrikes without further clearance was still withheld.

COMUSMACV, on 2 May, expressed concern that the expend authority without ground approval, granted to FAC and Spooky aircraft commanders, could result in unacceptable casualties to friendly ground forces. In the highly fluid tactical situation that existed in the Saigon area, it appeared extremely difficult to keep FAC and Spooky aircrews thoroughly abreast of exact locations of friendly units and personnel. In that light, COMUSMACV considered that Rules of Engagement changes of such significance should only be implemented after thorough coordination and ultimate approval of MACV. Accordingly, 7AF was requested to withdraw the authority granted FAC and Spooky aircrews in February and to reinstitute such authority only in areas where agreement could be reached with appropriate ground commanders and MACV.<sup>11/</sup>

The 7AF Commander concluded that COMUSMACV's letter referred only to A-37s; therefore, authority was withdrawn from the A-37s and a letter sent to MACV advising that the A-37 program was suspended:<sup>12/</sup>

*"7AF DO Secret Msg, DTG 260500 (April 1968) (authorizing A-37 strikes) is hereby rescinded. This deletes the authority for the pilot of an A-37 aircraft, with a qualified FAC in the right seat, to deliver ordnance on enemy rocket positions in the process of firing on friendly forces or installations."*

The message emphasized that the directive issued in late February--the original expenditure authorization granted FACs and Spooky--was still in effect.<sup>13/</sup> The

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letter to COMUSMACV stated: <sup>14/</sup>

*"I have withdrawn the authority for the pilot of an A-37 aircraft with a qualified FAC in the right seat, to deliver ordnance on enemy rocket positions in the process of firing on a friendly air base."*

On 26 May, II FForceV noted that the incidences of misdirected aerial ordnance increased during the month of May. There were two cases where gunships fired on friendly troops without having radio contact with the ground or having proper maps aboard the aircraft. The gunships most probably were Army. A review of 7AF "Summary of Short Round Incidents" subsequent to 1 January 1968 and updated to 18 July 1968, disclosed three short round incidents in the Saigon area. None of these incidents involved Spooky, FACs, or A-37 aircraft. Specifically vulnerable, with a heavy concentration of ground forces and the large number of night ambushes both static and moving, was the Bien Hoa/Tan Son Nhut rocket belt. Consequently, the Commander, II FForceV, requested that the FAC and Spooky authority to engage mortar or rocket positions without clearance be withdrawn. <sup>15/</sup>

On 28 May, COMUSMACV replied that 7AF had been requested to withdraw the authority earlier in the month and requested that immediate action be taken to withdraw the FAC/Spooky authority granted them in February. MACV had no objection to 7AF and Field Force Commanders arranging mutually agreed procedures for attacks on enemy rocket positions; however, such procedures were not to be determined or promulgated on a unilateral basis. Also, MACV requested notification of such arrangements when consummated. <sup>16/</sup>

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The Rules of Engagement expanding the FAC/Spooky authority were rescinded on 30 May. <sup>17/</sup> However, the 7AF Commander did not concur with the decision and notified COMUSMACV of the rescission and non-concurrence on 31 May: <sup>18/</sup>

*"In compliance with your directive I have temporarily withdrawn the authorization for Spookies and FACs to fire on rocket positions. However, I request reconsideration of your decision. I strongly believe that Spooky on station and authorized to immediately fire upon positively identified rocket sites in the process of launching rockets upon the Bien Hoa and/or Tan Son Nhut Air Bases complements the ground force's action to prevent such type attacks.*

*"If permission for Spooky to fire must be withheld until the ground force commander can approve, the effect of Spooky fire has been negated since either additional rockets have been launched and/or the VC have withdrawn their equipment. This exposes two of the largest bases in Vietnam with eighteen thousand people and 500 million dollars of equipment to additional rocket fire. I feel this is a far greater risk than the possibility of injury to friendly patrols. I realize that friendly patrols could be within 1500 meters of the launch site; however, the Spooky aircraft have been instructed to carefully concentrate their fire on the rocket site and if in doubt to withhold their fire pending ground clearance. Over the past few months Spooky has expended several times on rocket sites immediately after their launch in the Bien Hoa area without endangering the ground troops in the area. Prior to take off the Spooky crew is briefed on the location of ground forces. After airborne a refined location is received by radio since final troop disposition for the night has not been determined at the time of the pre-flight briefing. It is believed that these procedures coupled with the accuracy of the Spooky aircraft should protect any ground forces outside of a 200 meter radius of the launch site.*

*"...my staff will attempt to work out an arrangement with CG II FFV for continued utilization of Spooky in the Tan Son Nhut/Bien Hoa area."*

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In mid-June, COMUSMACV designated the Commanding General, II FForceV, as the authority to employ U.S. tactical air, helicopter-delivered fire, or artillery in the built-up area of Saigon/Cholon/Gia Dinh. The authority could be further delegated to the Senior U.S. Advisor to the Military Governor of Saigon/Gia Dinh, but no further delegation was authorized. Clearance to employ the above-mentioned fire supporting arms was to include political as well as military clearance.<sup>19/</sup> On 2 July, CG II FForceV delegated authority to employ U.S. tactical air and helicopter-delivered fire (gunships or armed slicks), artillery, and mortar fire within the built-up area of Saigon/Cholon/Gia Dinh to the Senior U.S. Advisor to the Military Governor.<sup>20/</sup> The authority was finally vested in the CG CMAC.

In reviewing the Rules of Engagement after the May Offensive, MACV IG noted several discrepancies between the rules as set down by MACV Directive 95-4, II FFV Regulation 525-9, CMD G-3 SOPs, and 9th Division Rules of Engagement. Some areas were contradictory while others were not in consonance. For example, MACV Directive 95-4 required GVN clearance for all airstrikes yet permitted armed helicopters to fire upon villages or hamlets without approval if the situation clearly presented an immediate threat to the crew. Further, the Directive specified that, under certain circumstances, inhabitants of urban areas had to be warned by leaflets and/or loudspeakers prior to air attacks. II FFV Regulation 525-9 and CMD SOPs did not include provisions for warning of inhabitants.<sup>21/</sup>

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## CHAPTER VIII

### HIATUS

Since Tet, enemy ground activity throughout the republic, which ranged from squad-size assaults against an outpost to a multi-regimental attack, continually decreased with the exception of the surge in early May (Fig. 24). Conversely, their attacks by fire in proportion to the ground effort rose steeply. Further, ground attacks during the month of June declined to the lowest level of enemy-initiated action in 1968, characterizing a country-wide trend--a generally increasing number of stand-off attacks. In III Corps, the preponderance of the activity centered around Saigon and during the 5 May attack, there were twice as many attacks by fire over those of 18 February, but only two-thirds the number of rounds.<sup>1/</sup>

The enemy clearly intended to sustain pressure on Saigon, yet his activity had fallen below the pre-Tet level. There were several probable contributing factors:<sup>2/</sup>

- He is husbanding his strength for another wave.
- His forces are generally weaker. Estimates place his losses as high as 36,000 KIA, or 76 percent of his strength, with green replacements who have had a minimum of training filling the ranks.
- He has been at least partially pre-empted by the concentrated ARC LIGHT strikes which started on 14 June.

After the repulsion of the early May assault, the weekly review of significant intelligence presented to COMUSMACV was dominated by the phrase, "Enemy activity throughout the Republic remained at a low level". The enemy

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had suffered extensive turnover. The ranks were, for the most part, filled with green recruits who were very young and had received reduced training. For instance, a sample of 62 infiltrator privates revealed only half had the normal 12 weeks of training, the remainder ranged from zero to eight weeks.<sup>3/</sup>

Captured enemy documents indicated that the next offensive was scheduled for August or early September. The estimate in part stated that the coming attacks would be fierce and the VC would have to sacrifice more soldiers than before. There were still a large number of troops coming from NVN. The 9th VC Division had received sufficient replacements and the Quyet Thang Regiment, which lost two battalions in early June, had also received replacements. Although the VC had penetration agents in Saigon, these agents were weak and would be reorganized and used as support for military attacks.<sup>4/</sup>

Another agent of proven reliability reported that VC forces were having great difficulty infiltrating the capital. He stated that there was a maximum effort being made to infiltrate weapons, ammunition, and men into the city. However, as of the date of this report, no attack had occurred. Perhaps the document captured on 1 July echoed the problems of other VC/NVA units:<sup>5/</sup>

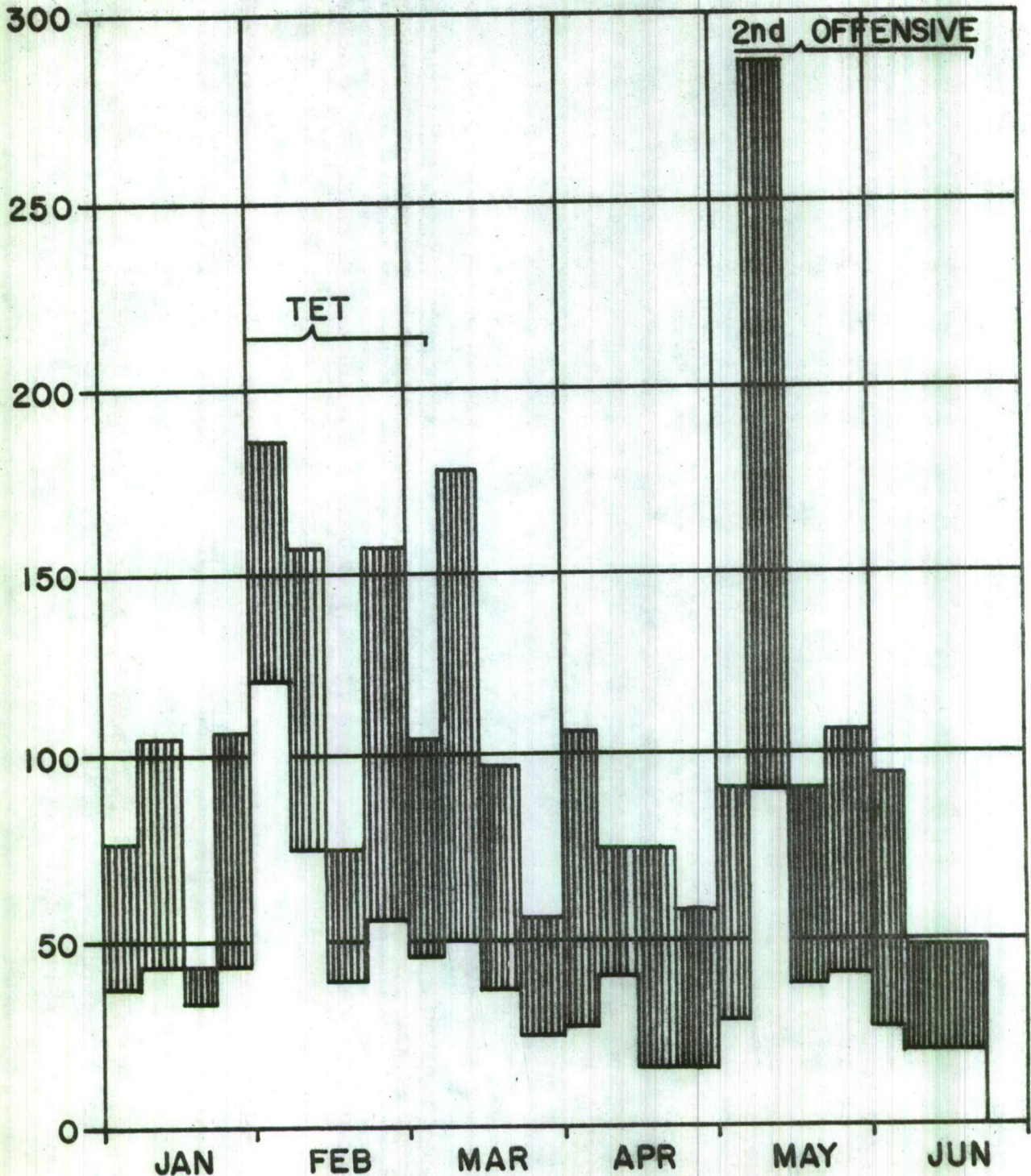
*"The battalion has only 104 men present for duty, including those on sick call....many were ill. Medicine was not available and local people dared not purchase it for them. The personnel feared airstrikes, artillery fire, and gunships."*

The extremely heavy pressure applied to the enemy by B-52 strikes, tac air, and artillery drastically upset the offensive timetable. It may, in fact, have delayed the third offensive indefinitely. According to an enemy document,

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# ENEMY ATTACKS COUNTRY-WIDE IN SVN



 ATTACKS BY FIRE  
 GROUND ATTACKS

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FIGURE 24

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on 21 July, instructions were passed to VC/NVA forces to cancel their plans for a third ground offensive and to await further orders. The reason for the postponement of attack plans was given as due to the loss of 15 percent of VC/NVA combat-effective troops by allied bombing and artillery raids plus approximately 30 percent of their troops were incapacitated due to illness and wounds.<sup>6/</sup> A COMUSMACV message attributed these statistics to a "fairly reliable source" and, in the absence of independent confirmation, must be qualified as possible VC deception.

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CHAPTER IX  
LESSONS LEARNED

An enemy situation report prepared by an unidentified agency of Sub-Region 6 (Saigon) mirrored the enemy estimate of U.S. and RVNAF attempts at coordinating efforts in the defense of Saigon. The document admitted that there had been some coordination between the U.S. and RVNAF, but they did not think their cooperative effort had been extensive enough to make their operation prohibitive. In addition, the document pointed out that the VC/NVA elements had failed to motivate the local populace to join in armed activities. Thus, there had not been sufficient replacements for the casualties sustained by VC/NVA units during the initial stage of the Second Offensive.<sup>1/</sup>

When combating the enemy in urban areas, the choice of weapons was of paramount importance if the enemy was to be ejected with minimum resultant damage to civilian property. Alert aircraft with mixed ordnance normally used for rural and jungle area combat were not generally effective in urban combat. Particularly undesirable were napalm and a mixture of CBU and HE bombs. Once the decision was made to employ tactical air, specifics as to munitions delivered must be stated.<sup>2/</sup> Conversely, in an After Action Report following the May Offensive, the 25th Infantry Division reported that:

*"If the position is heavily fortified, it may be wise to back off and call in airstrikes. Rather than back off the distance required for 750 pound bombs, we preferred to use napalm which could be brought in much closer to the troops."*

The size and type of bombs needed to obtain the desired results with

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fewest number of airstrikes should be used, residual effects considered. The large 750-pound delayed fuze bomb was more effective than many small bombs. Target marking for tactical air, gunships, or aerial CS drops necessitated special provisions and advance preparation.<sup>3/</sup>

As noted earlier, the abnormally high winds during early May undoubtedly caused greater damage by fires. Therefore, climatic conditions on the use of CS must be considered.

Airstrikes were effective primarily against hard targets such as fortified areas with underground emplacements which resisted direct and area fire. Airstrikes were used only when the decision had been reached that destruction was unavoidable.<sup>4/</sup>

Each airstrike requested was processed through the normal request channels. In many cases restrictive clearances and instructions were issued. Normally, a clearance for an airstrike included a designated 500-meter circle for ordnance employment. During the May Offensive, most of the clearances were for a pinpoint location with instructions to hit the pinpoint or not utilize the airstrike. In all cases, the airstrikes were controlled by a FAC who was in constant communication with the ground commanders who requested the strike.<sup>5/</sup>

The 5-12 May attacks on Saigon were considered in detail by the combined MACV/JGS Study Group and the recommendations listed below were approved for the Saigon/Cholon/Gia Dinh area:<sup>6/</sup>

- US/RVNAF plans for defense of urban areas will have as their key objective the interception and defeat of enemy prior to his reaching major urban areas.

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- The decision to use napalm, indirect artillery, helicopter gunships, and tactical air for close fire support in urban areas will be retained at Corps/Field Force level.
- Selected RVNAF units will be equipped ASAP with 90mm and 106mm recoilless rifles for close fire support in urban area fighting.
- Direct fire weapons will be used, whenever possible, for destruction of point targets and fortified structures.
- Helicopters will be used whenever possible to maneuver troops and heavy weapons to roofs of key buildings and other locations to expedite cordoning the enemy.
- US/RVNAF units charged with defense of key urban areas will receive refresher training to include practical exercises in urban warfare tactics.
- Selected RVNAF units will receive the necessary equipment to allow the maximum use of CS riot control agents in urban warfare.
- Selected CS agent munitions will be controlled and used only in urban area operations until theater stocks have reached required level....
- MACV/JGS and GVN agencies will initiate an extensive PSYOP program directed at the civilian populace in all urban areas of RVN as to protective measures, refugee guidance, resistance to the enemy and support for the government.
- Large scale (1:1000) detail city maps will be made available to appropriate US/RVNAF units and aerial photographs of the combat area will be provided on an "on call" basis.
- All defense plans will be reviewed to insure that there is an integrated defense to include US/RVNAF, National Police, and other GVN agencies, against infiltration of VC/NVA sappers, arsonists and terrorists into the cities.
- The defense plans will provide for refugee care, special equipment and resupply to National Police Field Forces and security for local GVN fire fighting units.
- JGS/GVN will develop an active self-defense program designed to augment warning nets, control points on routes of access, monitor curfew violations and report VC/NVA covert activities.

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APPENDIX I

ROCKET/MORTAR DAMAGE

<u>DATE</u>	<u>NR OF ROUNDS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COORDINATES</u>	<u>PRECINCT/VICINITY</u>
5 May	1	Mortar	XS-863922	1 Vic U.S. Embassy
	10	122mm Rocket	XS-873945	Go Vap area
	UNK	Mortar	XS-891939	Newport Bridge (no damage)
6 May	2	Mortar	XS-853899	2 Near International Hotel
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-866912	1
	8	122mm Rocket	XS-820960	TSN area 1 bldg dest
	3	122mm Rocket	XS-798945	TSN area 9th ARVN Base Camp
	15	60mm Mortar	XS-815938	TSN area 1 warehouse damaged
7 May	UNK	Mortar	XS-839884	5 Central Police Stn
	1	Unk Mortar	XS-846888	5 Cholon Power Stn
	13	122mm Rocket	XS-821955	TSN area minor dam (1) C-47
	5	122mm Rocket	XS-821955	TSN area 1 bldg dam
8 May	1	122mm Rocket	XS-865906	2 5 homes destroyed
	4	107mm Rocket	XS-820960	TSN area no damage
12 May	12	Unk Mortar	XS-891940	Newport Bridge
		Sabotage	XS-891940	Newport Bridge 50-60m 2 lanes destroyed
	UNK	Mortar	XS-871970	Binh Loi Bridge no damage

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>NR OF ROUNDS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COORDINATES</u>	<u>PRECINCT/VICINITY</u>
	3-4	60mm Mortar	XS-800900	6 38th Rangers no dam
19 May	3	122mm Rocket	XS-844915	3 Police Stn 3d Pct
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-853914	2 Near Independence Palace
	3	Unk	XS-854908	2 Near Hoa Lu BOQ
	3	Unk	XS-856905	2 Damage to homes
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-856905	2 4th Psyops Compound minor damage
	1	Unk	XS-856905	2 Fire damage
	4	122mm Rocket	XS-859903	2 716th MP Motor Pool Truck damaged
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-855894	2 Several homes damaged
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-866908	2 Residential area
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-868908	2 Hit old American Embassy
	UNK		XS-880895	4 Dock area
23 May	6	81mm Mortar	XS-898877	8 Police Station
27 May	6	Unk Mortar	XS-860950	Gia Dinh area
28 May	3	Unk Mortar	XS-785885	6 Phu Lam Stratcom
	2	Unk	XS-782885	6 Phu Lam Stratcom
	3	122mm Rocket	XS-831921	3 7 houses damaged
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-832916	3 6 houses damaged
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-840936	Go Vap area 6 houses damaged
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-823911	5
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-848944	Go Vap area garage damaged

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>NR OF ROUNDS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COORDINATES</u>	<u>PRECINCT/VICINITY</u>
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-838934	TSN area 1 bldg damaged
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-825941	TSN area 1 bldg damaged
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-848938	Phu Nhuan area
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-851934	1 1 house damaged
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-842912	3 2 houses damaged
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-815927	Phu Tho area
31 May	1	Mortar	XS-789884	6 536th Maint Bn Motor Pool 4, 1/4-ton damage
	1	Rocket	XS-856947	Go Vap area
	1	Rocket	XS-852944	Go Vap area - dud
2 Jun	3	122mm Rocket	XS-832901	5
	3	122mm Rocket	XS-813926	TSN area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-813933	TSN area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-835921	3 *
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-855945	Go Vap area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-843917	3 *
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-825931	TSN area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-831921	3 *
3 June	1	Mortar	XS-846887	5
	2	Mortar	XS846884	8
	6	Mortar	XS-847888	5 One hit on Cholon Electric Power Plant

\* Numerous civilian houses damaged and destroyed.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>NR OF ROUNDS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COORDINATES</u>	<u>PRECINCT/VICINITY</u>
	18	Mortar	XS-798864	7 Hit two ships at dock
5 June	1	Unk	XS-830888	5
	1	Unk	XS-845885	8 Minor damage Y Bridge
6 June	4-5	107mm Rocket	XS-883894	4 Nimor warehouse fire
	200 lbs C-4	Sabotage	XS-838886	5 Chinese newspaper bldg destroyed
	10	82mm Mortar	XS-847962	Go Vap area
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-776909	Tan Hoa Dong area, 30th Ranger Bn, no damage
7 June	1	122mm Rocket	XS-849909	3
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-851914	3
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-852908	2
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-849933	Go Vap area
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-843912	3
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-853920	3
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-844918	3
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-851906	2
	3	122mm Rocket	XS-861959	Go Vap area
8 June	Explosive Chg	Sabotage	XS-815895	5 Generator at power sta damaged, 3 civ houses damaged
	2	82mm Mortar	XS-868915	1
	2	82mm Mortar	XS-868914	1
	2	82mm Mortar	XS-870913	1
	4	82mm Mortar	XS-872921	1
	2	82mm Mortar	XS-869914	1
	3	82mm Mortar	XS-880895	4

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>NR OF ROUNDS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COORDINATES</u>	<u>PRECINCT/VICINITY</u>
	1	82mm Mortar	XS-881897	4
	6	82mm Mortar	XS-869906	4
9 June	3	Mortar	XS-896939	9 Newport Bridge-no damage
	4	Mortar	XS-820883	8 Vic bridge-no damage
10 June	1	Rocket	XS837928	3 *
	1	Rocket	XS-831932	TSN area*
	1	Rocket	XS-834930	TSN area*
	1	Rocket	XS814930	TSN area*
	1	Rocket	XS-835917	3 *
	1	Rocket	XS-826916	3 *
	1	Rocket	XS-822923	5 *
	1	Rocket	XS-834931	TSN area*
	1	Rocket	XS-837938	TSN area*
* Numerous civilian houses damaged and destroyed.				
11 June	1	122mm Rocket	XS-855909	2 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-865907	2 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-861918	1 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-863920	1 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-865926	1 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-866926	1 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-865913	1 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-863916	1 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-835938	TSN area+

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>NR OF ROUNDS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COORDINATES</u>	<u>PRECINCT/VICINITY</u>
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-857934	1 +
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-867916	1 +
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-857911	2 +
	4	122mm Rocket	XS-827939	TSN area+
	12	122mm Rocket	XS-857911	2 +

+ Three civilian houses damaged and three streets cratered.

12 June	1	122mm Rocket	XS-808942	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-809943	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-802954	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-797966	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-799965	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-803947	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-816957	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-811953	TSN area#
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-812953	TSN area#
	2	122mm Rocket	XS-820948	TSN area#
	3	122mm Rocket	XS-809945	TSN area#

# 1 U-21 acft dest, 1 helo dest, 6 acft damaged, 1 fuel trk damaged.

13 June	20	82mm Mortar	XS-845969	Go Vap area
14 June	1	107mm Rocket	XS-816955	TSN area+
	1	107mm Rocket	XS-813955	TSN area+
	1	107mm Rocket	XS-812956	TSN area+
	1	107mm Rocket	XS-812954	TSN area+

+ 1 U-3 dest, 1 hangar damaged.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>NR OF ROUNDS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COORDINATES</u>	<u>PRECINCT/VICINITY</u>
15 June	10	82mm Mortar	XS-829874	8
	20	82mm Mortar	XS-830873	8
	18	82mm Mortar	XS-824886	5
	1	82mm Mortar	XS-829886	5
16 June	1	107mm Rocket	XS-883894	4
	2	107mm Rocket	XS-882893	4
	1	107mm Rocket	XS-880894	4
17 June	30	82mm Mortar	XS-787871	6
18 June	1	122mm Rocket	XS-838983	TSN area
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-858983	TSN area
20 June	1	122mm Rocket	XS-835936	TSN area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-833936	TSN area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-835946	TSN area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-838934	TSN area*
	1	122mm Rocket	XS-806946	TSN area*
* Caused damage to one house and one building.				
21 June	1	107mm Rocket	XS-802948	TSN area
	1	107mm Rocket	XS-805947	TSN area

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# UNCLASSIFIED

## GLOSSARY

ALO	Air Liaison Officer
ARVN	Army of Republic of Vietnam
ASAP	As Soon As Possible
AW	Automatic Weapons
BDA	Bomb Damage Assessment
Bn	Battalion
CE	Combat Effectiveness
CICV	Counterintelligence Corps, Vietnam
CG	Commanding General
CMAC	Capital Military Assistance Command
CMD	Capital Military District
CO	Commanding Officer
COMUSMACV	Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CP	Command Post
DASC	Direct Air Support Center
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FFV	Field Force, Vietnam
FM	Frequency Modulation
FWF	Free World Force
FWMAF	Free World Military Assistance Forces
GVN	Government of Vietnam
HE	High Explosive
HF	High Frequency
I FFV	I Field Force, Vietnam
IG	Inspector General
JDOC	Joint Defense Operations Center
JGS	Joint General Staff
KBA	Killed by Air
KIA	Killed in Action
km	Kilometer
Lbs	Pounds
LZ	Landing Zone
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
mm	millimeter
MP	Military Police

# UNCLASSIFIED

NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PPIF Psyops	Photo Processing and Interpretation Facility Psychological Operations
RITS	Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron
RPG	Rocket-Propelled Grenade
RTS	Reconnaissance Technical Squadron
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SCAR SOP	Strike Control and Reconnaissance Standing Operating Procedure
TACC	Tactical Air Control Center
TACP	Tactical Air Control Party
TOC	Tactical Operations Center
TSN	Tan Son Nhut
TV	Television
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
US/RVNAF	United States/Republic of Vietnam Air Force
UTM	Universal Transverse Mercator
VC	Viet Cong
VNAF	Vietnamese Air Force
WIA	Wounded in Action