

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS 377TH COMBAT SUPPORT GROUP (PACAF)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96307**

MAR 9, 1968

REPLY TO:

ATTN OF: Base Security Police

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Actions Report (RCS: MACV J3-32)(U)

TO: 7th Air Force (IGS)

1. (U) Type Operation: Mortar, rocket, automatic/small arms, and ground attacks against Tan Son Nhut Air Base and the Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area.
2. (U) Dates of Operation: 0320 hours, 31 January 1968 through 2100 hours, 31 January 1968. Small arms/automatic weapons fire and probing actions on various parts of the perimeter continued through 9 February 1968.
3. (U) Location: Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, and the adjacent Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area. The major ground penetration was centered from the 049 Bunker to the 051 Gate on the west perimeter. Enemy ground penetration attempts were also conducted at O.F. 10 (Gate 10, Southeast Perimeter) and MACV Annex (Adjacent to Gate 10).
4. (U) Command and Control Headquarters: Joint Defense Operations Center Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area.
5. (U) Unit Commanders Engaged in Operations:
 - a. Lt Colonel Luu Kim Cuong Comdr., 33rd VNAF Wing (Comdr., TSN Sensitive Area)
 - b. Major Phung Van Chieu Comdr., TSN Sensitive Point and Dep Comdr., TSN Sensitive Area
 - c. Colonel Farley E. Peebles Comdr., 377th Combat Support Gp
 - d. Colonel Luther J. Miller Senior Advisor AFAT #1, 33rd Wing
 - e. Lt Col Bernard L. Garred Jr. Senior Advisor TSN Sensitive Area
 - f. Lt Col Billy J. Carter Comdr, 377th Security Police Sq.
 - g. Lt Col Peter P. Borowski Comdr, MACV Annex
 - h. Major Ronald K. Kollhoff Comdr, Armed Helicopter Plt, 120th Aviation Company
6. (U) Units Engaged:
 - a. 2nd Services Battalion (ARVN)

- b. 8th Airborne Battalion (ARVN)
- c. 53rd Regional Force Battalion (ARVN)
- d. 1st Marine Battalion (ARVN)
- e. 4th Marine Battalion(ARVN)
- f. 377th Security Police Squadron
- g. Task Force 35
- h. Task Force Peter
- i. A Troop, 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment
- j. 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division
- k. 1st Battalion, 18th INF, 1st Infantry Division
- l. 2nd Battalion, 27th INF, 25th Infantry Division
- m. 2nd Battalion, 327th Regiment, 101st Division
- n. 1st Battalion, 27th Regiment, 25th Infantry Division
- o. 1 Platoon Armed Helicopters - 120th Aviation Company
- p. 3 Counter Mortar Radar Sites
- q. Provisional Battle Group - (Hong Tong Tay Depot Area)
- r. 1 Platoon 105mm - ARVN Artillery (TSN) - JDOC
- s. 1 Platoon 155mm - ARVN Artillery (Co Loa) - JDOC
- t. 1 Composite Rifle Company, 33rd VNAF Wing Defense Control Group - JDOC
- u. 1 Tank Platoon, 33rd VNAF Wing Defense Control Group - JDOC
- v. Miscellaneous R.F. and P.F. Elements throughout TSNSA - JDOC
- w. 150 USAF Augmentees to 377th Security Police Squadron (Law Enforcement Section for escort of personnel from Saigon Area).
- x. VNAF and 7th AF TACC

- y. 1 Battery 105mm, 25th INF Division
- z. A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Division
- aa. Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area Advisory Team

7. (C) Intelligence:

a. Pre-attack Intelligence:

(1) Intelligence reports plus raw information received by JDOC 30 days prior to the attack indicated to this level of command that some kind of enemy action would occur during the TET holiday season. The intelligence estimate of the situation gave the enemy a capability of mounting a large scale rocket or mortar attack plus a ground attack with a strength of not more than a reinforced battalion. A training exercise was written on 24 January 1968 and distributed to the Commanders concerned for appraisal and subsequent implementation on the night of 26-27 January 1968. The exercise was designed to test the capabilities of all security forces assigned to the TSN Sensitive Area. The 0-51 Gate, considered the most vulnerable point of the perimeter and the anticipated enemy avenue of approach from the Cambodian border was selected as the practice enemy point of penetration. Practice condition YELLOW was initiated at 0025 hours, 27 January 1968. Exercise TET was conducted, including a commanders' critique at 0500 hours at the JDOC Command Post.

(2) The intelligence situation for the days immediately preceding the attack remained relatively unchanged from the normal. There was no significant input of information indicating that an enemy attack on Tan Son Nhut was imminent. Intelligence collection agencies identified no significant changes of the location, posture, or strength of the enemy forces in the area.

(3) At 1020 hours, 30 January 1968, the Commander, 377th Security Police Squadron, declared Security Alert Condition Grey in effect for his unit in reaction to the increased enemy activity during the TET Truce and the decrease of the Vietnamese Defense Force units due to the holidays.

(4) At 1732 hours, 30 January 1968, the 377th Security Police Squadron was placed in Security Alert Condition RED (Option I) by order of the Commander, Seventh Air Force. The Joint Defense Operations Center (JDOC) tried to confirm the unilateral Air Force Security Condition RED (Option I) through U.S. Army channels with negative results. All forces within the TSNSA remained in Security Alert Condition White except the 377th Security Police Squadron and Task Force 35, which were in Condition RED, and all other TSN Defense Forces which were in Condition YELLOW.

b. Post-attack Intelligence Information: The following information has been collected from numerous intelligence sources, including Seventh Air Force, MACV, and agencies

directly supporting the Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area.

(1) The attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base was an integral part of the enemy offensive against the Gia Dinh Province and the government of the Republic of South Vietnam.

(2) It has been asserted that plans for the attack of Tan Son Nhut were formulated and discussed by the Viet Cong cadre as early as 22 December 1967. In subsequent meetings, the attack was planned for the period preceding the TET holidays.

(3) Intelligence sources reflect that an estimated nine enemy battalions were in the greater Saigon Area, and at least seven of them were involved in the attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The enemy battalions in the greater Saigon area were augmented and supported by approximately twelve identified companies or larger-size elements of the 5th Division of the North Vietnamese Army.

(4) Although all units involved in the attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base have not been clearly identified, specific actions of the enemy and the designations of the attacking units have been established. The roles of enemy units and their identities are discussed below:

(a) Unidentified elements of the enemy directed automatic weapons fire onto the installation in the direction of the POL Storage Area and the C-130 Parking Area. This fire came from an off base position on the east end of the airfield near the runway approaches.

(b) Heavy pressure from enemy elements of the C-10 Sapper Battalion and the 2nd Local Force Battalion was exerted on the Joint General Staff Headquarters, located adjacent to the southeast perimeter of the installation, and a subsequent penetration by these units was made through the southeast perimeter fence of JGS.

(c) Heavy small arms fire was directed towards Gate #2 by unconfirmed enemy elements. These elements were probably assigned to the 2nd Local Force Battalion and the C-10 Sapper Battalion.

(d) Enemy elements, probably from the 6th Local Force Battalion and the C-10 Sapper Battalion, assaulted the south entry control point of the MACV Annex, approximately 250 meters southeast of the base perimeter fence. This enemy force is estimated to have been a reinforced company (200+).

(e) Enemy forces estimated at four reinforced battalions mounted an offensive against the west perimeter of Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The units involved and their probable tactical deployment are indicated below. The three principal, battalion-size units were positioned in column at the time of the assault.

1. Elements of the C-10 Sapper Battalion approached the fence line via Lambretta taxi on National Highway #1. The sapper elements dismounted the vehicle and detonated

what is believed to have been a Bangalore Torpedo on the fence line. The explosion opened a section of the outer perimeter fence, and the breach was used continuously by the enemy forces for entry onto the installation. The same elements of the C-10 Sapper Battalion remained with the initial assault force and penetrated the perimeter. The staging area of the sapper element was in the vicinity of Phu Cuong Village, approximately fifteen Kilometers north of Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

2. The 267th Viet Cong Battalion (Main Force) composed of approximately 25 per cent NVA, was the lead battalion and the major assault force in the penetration of the west perimeter. This battalion, like all of the attacking battalions, had a strength of 450 to 500 men. Members of this unit made the deepest penetration into the installation. Its staging area was approximately six Kilometers south of Due Hoa Village, approximately eighteen Kilometers west of the base.

3. The 16th Battalion, Viet Cong (Main Force) AKA D-16 (NVA), was the second unit in line of the assaulting forces. Numerous KIA from this unit were identified inside and immediately outside the perimeter fence. It is probable that this battalion was co-located with or at least in close proximity to the 267th Battalion identified in paragraph (a) above, since the delineation of their lines could not be clearly identified and their dead were co-mingled. The greatest proportion of this unit was NVA.

4. The 269th Viet Cong Battalion (Main Force) was the rear unit in line. Its bivouac area prior to the attack was in the immediate area of Duc Hoa. This unit was engaged from its eastern and southern flank by elements of the 53rd Regional Forces Battalion prior to their arrival at the perimeter fence.

5. The 90th Battalion of the 1st NVA (Cover Number KB-604) Regiment was located in the VINATEXCO factory northwest of the breached perimeter fence. This battalion had 12 mortar positions to the immediate north, west and south of the factory and probably rendered support fire to the assault forces often referred to by interrogated prisoners. This unit sustained 170(+) KIA primarily during the air attack on the factory during the day of 31 January 1968. It has been reported by Vietnamese intelligence sources that among the many casualties in the factory there were 7 NVA pilots and 15 NVA aircraft technicians.

6. Supporting elements of these battalions or elements of other unidentified battalions provided supporting artillery fire for the attacking hostile ground forces.

8. (C) Security Police Status:

a. The total Security Police assigned strength at the time of the hostilities was 890 personnel. Of this total, 75 personnel, or eight percent of the assigned strength, were TDY, R & R, hospital, or emergency leave status or awaiting completion of in-country training. (The TDY personnel included approximately fifty men assigned to three detachments at remote sites.) The present for duty (PFD) strength was 815 personnel, 56 percent (457) of which were physically on post at the time of the attack. As a result of

being placed on Red Alert at 1730 hours, 30 January 1968, eight 13 man Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) were formed, equipped, and readied for immediate response in the event of attack. This totaled 104 men, or 13 percent of the PFD strength. The 262 remaining Security Police Personnel, or 32 per cent of the PFD strength, were armed and billeted in the squadron barracks for immediate recall.

b. Upon implementation of Condition RED (Option I), three platoons of U.S. Army personnel (Task Force 35) were alerted and placed on five-minute standby status as augmentation reserve forces for the 377th Security Police Squadron. These platoons, composed of 30 men each, were immediately placed under the operational control of the Commander, 377th Security Police Squadron, in accordance with published and approved base defense plans.

c. In accordance with existing procedures, the squadron was divided into two flights. The night flight, which was on duty at the time of the attack, consisted of two officers and 446 airmen. Manning was as follows:

(1) Security Flight

(a) Supervision

<u>1.</u> Flight Commander (1st Lt)	1
<u>2.</u> Assistant Flight Commander	1
<u>3.</u> Joint Defense Operations Center	3 (Liaison and Alternate CSC)
<u>4.</u> Communicator/Plotter and Clerks	4
<u>5.</u> CSC Standard SAT's (2)	<u>6</u>
	15 men

(b) Alpha Sector

1. Sector NCOIC	1
2. M-16 Bunkers	23
3. Tower Guards	12
4. Special Posts (Entry Controllers)	14
5. SAT's (2)	6
6. MLR M-60 Bunkers (2)	<u>4</u>
	60 men

(c) Bravo Sector

1. Sector NCOIC	1
2. M-16 Bunkers	7
3. Tower Guards	6
4. Area Guards and Entry Controllers	24
5. SAT's (2)	9
6. MLR M-60 Bunker (4)	<u>8</u>

55 men

(d) Charlie Sector

1. Sector NCOIC	1
2. M-16 Bunkers	9
3. Special Posts and Entry Controllers	17
4. SATs (3)	6
5. MLR M-60 Bunker	<u>2</u>
	35 men

(e) Delta Sector

1. Sector NCOIC	1
2. Entry Controllers and Revetment Guards	27
3. M-16 Bunkers	15
4. MLR M-60 Bunkers	8
5. SATs (2)	<u>6</u>
	57 men

(f) Echo Sector

1. Sector NCOIC	1
2. 051 Bunker	5
3. Tower Guards	5
4. M-16 Bunkers	12
5. Revetment, Entry Control, and Special Posts	14
6. MLR M-60 Bunkers	3
7. SATs (2)	<u>7</u>
	47 men

(g) Foxtrot Sector

1. Sector NCOIC	1
2. Tower Guards	2
3. MLR M-16 and M-60 Bunkers	4
4. SATs (2)	<u>5</u>
	12 men

(h) Reserve SAT 12

TOTAL SECURITY FLIGHT 293

(2) K-9 Section

(a) NCOIC	1
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(b) Supervisors	2
(c) Armed Patrol (SAT)	6
(d) Kennel Support	2
(e) Sentry Dog Team	<u>47</u>
TOTAL K-9 SECTION	58 men

(3) Law Enforcement Flight

(a) Flight Commander and Assistant	2
(b) Desk Sergeant, Desk Clerk, and Communicator	4
(c) Patrols (4) and Joint Patrols (2)	12
(d) Entry Controllers (Gates)	15
(e) Entry Controllers, Cantonment Areas, and Special Posts	29
(f) Seventh Air Force Compound Security Guards	12
(g) Quick Reaction Team	13
(h) Customs and Terminal Security	<u>8</u>
TOTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT	101

(4) Others

(a) Weapons Systems Security Operations Officer	1
(b) Armory	<u>4</u>
TOTAL OTHERS	5

TOTAL ON DUTY 457

(5) Eight 13 man Quick Reaction Teams 104

(6) Reserve Security Policemen 254

(7) Three platoons U.S. Army Reserve
(Task Force 35)(30 men each.)
2 Platoons, 69th Signal Battalion
1 Platoon, 53rd Trans Battalion 90

TOTAL U.S. Security Forces: 905
(377th Security Police Squadron and
Task Force 35 which was under the
operational control of 377th Security
Police Sq)

9. (C) Execution: -See Battle Description Atch #1

10. (C) Results:

a. Enemy Losses: The enemy forces sustained 157 KIA (body count) within the base

perimeter, and nine POW's were taken by the friendly forces within the same area.

Immediately outside the perimeter fence, 267 enemy bodies were counted until the counting action was terminated due to more pressing operational requirements. All of these enemy KIA and POW were probably sustained by the C-10 Sapper Unit, 267th Battalion, 16th Battalion, and the 90th Battalion all of which were identified in paragraph 7b(4)(e) above. The 269th Battalion all of which were identified in paragraph 7b(4)(e) above, which was in ground contact with the 53rd Regional Force Battalion with supporting Light Fire Team dispatched to their area by JDOC, suffered 286 KIA (US confirmed V.C. body count). Friendly elements (2nd Services Battalion and Task Force Peter) operating in the O.F. 10 (Gate 10) area accounted for 82+ enemy dead (body count). The total enemy body count, including the 170+ KIA referred to in para 7b(4)(e)5 above, was 962+.

b. Friendly Casualties:

U.S. Forces
KIA

Vietnamese Forces
KIA

USAF - 4 (Security Police)
U.S. Army - 19

VNAF - 5
ARVN/RF - 27

WIA

WIA

USAF - 11 (Security Police)
U.S. Army - 75

VNAF - 12
ARVN/RF - 67

TOTAL FRIENDLY KIA - 55

TOTAL FRIENDLY WIA - 163

c. A total of 145 weapons were captured on the installation, 43 of which were crew served. Figures for the off-base collection of weapons are not available.

d. Aircraft Damage:

U.S. Aircraft:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Lightly Damaged</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>	<u>Total</u>
AC-47 (USAF)	9	0	9
C-47 (USAF)	1	0	1
C-54 (USAF)	1	0	1
C-117 (USN)	2	0	2

VNAF: None damaged or destroyed.

e. Structural Damage:

(1) 4 Conexes of paint burned (Total Loss)

- (2) 1 Trailer Van burned (Total Loss)
- (3) 1 Trailer House burned (Total Loss)
- (4) 1 Shed roof damaged (Repairable)
- (5) Approximately 400 ft of electrical power cable to a communications complex was damaged by a grass fire (Repairable)
- (6) Approximately 50 perimeter lights (Repairable)

f. Runway Damage: A 3' x 1' x 3" hole on the edge of the runway was inflicted by ordnance impact. The runway remained operational and the damage was repaired the same day.

g. Enemy Ordnance Collection:

(1) The following ordnance was collected on the installation:

- (a) 22 VC booby traps (locally fabricated)
- (b) 8 VC DHB claymore mines
- (c) 12 VC DH 10 claymore mines
- (d) 37 Chicom B40 rocket mortars
- (e) 84 Chicom B-40 rockets
- (f) 38 USSR PG-7 rockets
- (g) 103 Chicom RKC-3TG grenades
- (h) 95 VC stick grenades
- (i) 40 VC home made grenades
- (j) 13 VC plastic explosive charges
- (k) 142 Chicom TNT blocks
- (l) 17 VC demo kits - satchel charges
- (m) 12,000 rds Chicom 7.62 intermediate ammo
- (n) 2,000 rds Chicom 7.62 rimmed ammo
- (o) 5 US 81mm mortars, HE
- (p) 45 US M26 grenades
- (q) 15 US 81mm mortars, illuminating
- (r) 65 US 40mm grenades
- (s) 19 claymore mines
- (t) 5 US 57mm recoilless rifle rds
- (U) 47 rds US 50 cal ammo

(2) USAF Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) units, collecting ordnance off the installation in the immediate vicinity of the west perimeter fence, detonated a pile of enemy ordnance estimated to have a high explosive yield of approximately 100 pounds.

11. (C) Follow-up Action: Periodic small arms fire, harassment fire, and enemy movement around the installation continued through to the rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base 18 February 1968. On 10 separate occasions in the four days following the prepenetration, Security Alert Teams (SATs) of this organization made direct contact with enemy positions firing small arms and automatic weapons onto the

installation. Two engagements resulted in secondary explosions of the enemy positions. Friendly forces operating outside the installation made frequent contacts with the enemy near the base. These contacts varied in size, but were all part of the total enemy offensive on Tan Son Nhut and the Saigon area. As of 23 February 1968, 5,519 enemy were KIA (body count) in the greater Saigon area. Sweeping, clearing, and rescuing operations by friendly forces are in effect to this date (4 March 1968). The actions of the enemy clearly substantiate the contention that they have no intention of withdrawing from the area and allowing the installation to revert to its previously secure status. This evaluation is further supported by the fact that post-attack intelligence revealed that the Viet Cong attack forces had no plan for withdrawal of their units.

12. (C) Lessons Learned: The concept that Tan Son Nhut Air Base can be penetrated only by small sapper units and that the enemy has the capability to launch only small scale operations in the Tan Son Nhut vicinity became obsolete with the 31 January 1968 attack and the TET Offensive, and a new type of enemy threat was encountered. A major re-evaluation of present base defense procedures and principles has become an immediate necessity.

a. Security Police personnel and augmentees (TF-35) were well-supervised and well-trained in fire control and discipline and in basic tactics, but were neither equipped nor trained well enough to effectively counter a regiment-size enemy assault. Consideration should be given to Base Security Police receiving more infantry type training prior to assignment in Southeast Asia. Emphasis should be placed on crew served and heavy weapons, assault tactics, and deployment procedures. Existing Air Force training in the ZI and in Southeast Asia is not sufficient to enable Security Police forces to effectively counter forces of this size, equipped as they were.

b. Current concepts of base defense and protection of USAF resources as established by higher headquarter's directives should be reviewed. In our opinion too much emphasis is placed on the close-in protection of resources. With the weapons available to the enemy, close-in guards are useless. Security forces must be moved from the revetments and other restricted areas to the perimeter, where they can effectively engage the enemy. Further, we must have the capability to respond with properly equipped reaction forces. In conjunction with this, the existing defense alignment of the installation must be re-evaluated and changed in light of the new enemy tactics encountered.

c. Reaction forces were able to respond quickly and halt the enemy advance. This was primarily due to the base defense posture at the time of the attack. Had the Security condition been anything other than RED (Option I) or YELLOW, reaction forces would have had to contain the enemy further inside the interior of the base, probably at much greater loss in lives and USAF resources. It is recommended that a larger standby reaction force be utilized in place of the 12 man Reserve Security Alert Team (RSAT). A fifty man reaction force properly equipped with the same immediate response capability as RSAT would more realistically enable Security Police personnel to halt the enemy at an acceptable distance from priority resources.

d. A free fire zone/clear area must be established around the perimeter of the base. If free fire zones/clear areas had been established the enemy would not have had easy access to the perimeter fence and much of the small arms activity would not have taken place. These zones would also have prevented the enemy from setting up crew served weapon positions and ammunition supply areas adjacent to the base perimeter. Recommend that the free fire zone be extended at least 1,000 meters around the perimeter.

e. Medical personnel should be more readily available to the Security Police. Their training, manning and employment should be such that they would be capable of immediate support to the base defense operation. Entry of medical personnel into the affected area and subsequent evacuation of wounded became an acute problem during the battle. If medical personnel are to continue to be employed in this theater of operation, independent of base defense forces, they must establish and maintain a close liaison with the Security Police to insure that they are fully aware of the positioning of all defensive units and routes of entry into all areas. In addition, medical personnel must receive sufficient combat training to enable them to effectively perform under hostile fire.

f. A more stringent control of weapons issue to non-defensive force personnel is immediately required. Many of these personnel hampered the Security Police effort and on some occasions were nearly mistaken for hostile forces. Personnel should be instructed to take cover, and weapons should not be issued until Security Condition RED (Option II) is declared.

g. It has been determined from battlefield reports that at the point of penetration some personnel of the 2nd Services Battalion (ARVN) deserted their static defense posts. Reasons for the desertion have not been established, but an investigation is being conducted by the Vietnamese authorities. From these reports, it is apparent that there is need for closer coordination between Vietnamese and U.S. Forces involved in the combined defense of an installation. All indications point to an absolute need for the co-manning of defensive positions throughout the perimeter.

h. Local intelligence data available to the base defense forces was entirely void of information pertinent to enemy plans and movements in the immediate area. Defense force personnel must assume that future intelligence reports have questionable validity. They must maintain a posture that will render them totally prepared for an attack at any time, regardless of intelligence indicators.

i. The most significant lesson learned from the attack, and the one which requires the most immediate attention, is the need for more and better equipment. Heavier weapons are urgently needed to effectively combat penetrating forces.

(1) XM-148 Grenade launchers proved to be difficult to operate under combat conditions. Their use is extremely limited during the hours of darkness as their design requires a special sighting device which is useless during darkness. Recommend we consider bringing M-79 Grenade Launchers back into the Air Force inventory, and its

wide variety of ordnance (HE, illumination, canister, white phosphorous, etc.) be obtained for maximum utilization. As an alternate solution, recommend the sighting mechanism of the XM-148 be corrected immediately to allow for effective night-time employment.

(2) Mortars should be considered for direct support illumination and for direct HE fire against attacking ground forces and enemy support fire positions.

(3) Recoilless rifles would have been of great assistance in destroying positions adjacent the West perimeter and inside the 051 Bunker. The counter attack would have been started much earlier and completed at less cost to friendly forces if reaction forces had been able to suppress and destroy enemy crew-served positions.

(4) Some type of rocket launcher is a must. The Army has in its inventory a light anti-tank weapon (LAW) which is considered ideal for destroying reinforced enemy positions. The LAW could be carried as part of a Security Alert Team's equipment. The weapon is easily operated and the launcher is disposable after use. It's incorporation into the Security Police inventory would be an immediate and noteworthy improvement.

(5) In conjunction with the need for heavier weapons and increased fire power, the safe transportation of this equipment and personnel is a must. Armored personnel carriers (APCs) are considered the most appropriate vehicle for this transportation. These vehicles can be utilized for transportation to the affected area, heavy weapons support fire, and evacuation of injured. Although neither this nor any other vehicle will provide total-safety for the personnel, it will provide protection from small arms and small caliber automatic weapons fire.

(6) It was evident during the attack that the present communications system employed by Security Police personnel was completely unsatisfactory. There is a strong need for more powerful portable units, able to receive all units involved in the defense operation. This would alleviate the problem of units cutting each other out because they did not receive other units transmitting. Power sources which can sustain operational requirements over an extended period of time are necessary for these radio units. Had the installation been subjected to more than one penetration, multi-channel (more than two) radios would have been required to successfully contain and destroy the attacking forces.

(7) Direct communications with supporting units (LFTs, AC-47s, Flare Ships, etc.) is an immediate requirement. This capability is essential for effective direct control of supporting units on the scene by in-place Security Police supervisory personnel. During the initial phases of the battle, requests for and direction of specific support fire had to be relayed from on-scene positions through Security Police radio channels to JDOC, which relayed the requests and directions to the supporting units. The resulting time lag made the supporting fire less effective than it would have been if direct communications had been available.

J. The above lessons learned of course apply to operations in SEA. We do not intend to

imply that these recommendations would apply Air Force wide.

(This Page is Unclassified)

13. (U) Security Classification: This report is classified Confidential sp;/ NOFORN because it reflects detailed information relative to damage of U.S. resources resulting from enemy attack and describes counter measures employed by free world forces in response to enemy actions. Reproduction of this document in whole or in part by recipients is authorized on an as needed basis.

FOR THE COMMANDER

BILLY J. CARTER, Lt Col, USAF
Chief, Security Police

2 Atch
1. Battle Discription
2. Glossary

(This Page is Unclassified)

BATTLE DESCRIPTION

1. On the nights of 30-31 January 1968, all security forces were in condition Yellow with the exception of the 377th Security Police Squadron, which was in Condition Red.
2. At approximately 2100 hours, 30 January 1968, the 53rd Airfield Security Battalion (RF) received intelligence information from JDOC that approximately 80 Viet Cong were moving west to east at the vicinity of the village of Xom Go Mayh coordinates XS754964. The battalion immediately organized a twenty man patrol and moved on a large sweep from coordinates XS774939 to XS776934 to XS7639146. The patrol then moved to XS773948 and set up an ambush (Approximately 2345 hours). At 0145 hours the patrol, having seen nothing that would indicate the movement of troops, moved to vicinity coordinates XS771950 and then returned to the Battalion CP, two kilometers west of the TSN base perimeter.
3. At 0300 hours, JDOC was informed that the US Embassy and the Saigon Radio Station were under attack. At 0305 hours JDOC was notified that the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) Compound was under attack. Condition Red was put into affect and all commanders reported to JDOC. At approximately 0320 hours, the guard in Tower #16 (ESE corner of the installation) reported observing small arms fire directed at the POL area from an off base position. A Sector Primary Security Alert Team and a CSC Standard SAT were dispatched. (The situation was monitored on the scene by the Operations Officer and the Flight Commander) Quick Reaction Teams (QRT's) and Task

Force 35 (Army Reserve Augmentation Forces) were briefed and dispatch to pre-designated rendezvous points.

4. At approximately 0320 hours, Gate #2, (ESE perimeter of the base near J.G.S) reported small arms, fire into their location from off base positions. A Sector SAT was dispatched.
5. At approximately 0327 hours, a Security Alert Team reported that heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire was being received off the east perimeter and directed at the POL area. (This report was received at JDOC from both U.S. and VN guard positions).
6. At approximately 0330 hours, 31 January 1968 the guards on the northern bunker of 53rd RF Bn Compound gave the alarm that several hundred man were moving west to east approximately 400 meters north of the CP. Approximately five minutes later, the guards reported hearing the sound of automatic weapons fire from the direction of the airfield. At approximately 0330 hours, Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area placed a helicopter Light Fire Team under the control of the 53rd Bn, 3rd Co. The LFT was directed to strafe the area where the enemy troops were concentrated.
7. At approximately 0333 hours, the 051 bunker (E-6, Southwest perimeter fence line) reported that grenades and mortar rounds were being fired towards the western perimeter, but were falling short. A Sector SAT (E-1), a CSC Standard SAT (C-2), and the Reserve Sat (RSAT) were dispatched. (This report was received at JDOC thru both U.S. and VN guard positions).
8. At approximately 0334 hours, E-6 reported that he observed approximately twenty-five individuals east of the first tree line, approximately 100 meters off the west perimeter fence line, directing small arms and automatic weapons fire towards the west perimeter. Fire was returned by static friendly positions and responding units.
9. At approximately 0340 hours, the 0-51 Bunker reported that they had been hit by a mortar or rocket and that mortar or rocket rounds were landing on base. CSC dispatched an ambulance to the 0-51 Bunker to evacuate the wounded. The ambulance however, was unable to reach the bunker due to the heavy enemy fire.
10. At approximately 0344 hours, the 051 Bunker reported the west perimeter fence was being breached near the 0-51 Gate (75 meters north of the 051 Bunker) and that enemy forces were coming onto the base. The Echo QRT and two platoons of Task Force 35 were dispatched to the area and deployed as the initial blocking force.
11. At approximately 0345 hours, two additional QRTs were dispatched and deployed along with the Echo QRT and the two platoons of Task Force 35. These units were deployed parallel to and approximately 100 meters north of Taxiway W-6 to preclude further enemy infiltration to the East.
12. At approximately 0347 hours, Echo Sector SAT reported the Echo Main Line of

Resistance (MLR) was taking mortars or rockets.

13. At approximately 0355 hours, an explosive round, possibly a 40mm grenade, landed adjacent to the operations building of the 2nd Services Battalion located near Gate #10 (OF 10) approximately 300 meters South of the POL Storage Area. Within 2 or 3 minutes heavy enemy small arms, automatic weapons fire, and RPG-2 rocket fire was being directed at the friendly positions all along the Gate #10 Area.

14. At approximately 0359 hours, Tower A, (southwest perimeter fence, fifty meters east of the 0-51 Gate) reported that hostile forces were mounting an assault south of his tower and that a light fire team was making contact with the enemy in the fields west of the base.

15. At approximately 0410 hours, in the vicinity of coordinates XS783954 the previously dispatched 53/13 R.F. Company patrol engaged what was then believed to be an enemy platoon. The patrol exchanged fire with the enemy for approximately five minutes and, due to the enemy's obvious effort to surround the unit, they withdrew south approximately 200 meters and called in a LFT for assistance. The LFT strafed the area with MG and rocket fire. A subsequent search of the area revealed 5 VC KIA at the location of the fire-fight and 65 VC KIA (Body count) in the field surrounding the scene. It is believed that this unit was the reinforcing elements for the attack on the airfield. After disengaging with no friendly losses the unit moved back to the Battalion CP for resupply of ammunition.

16. At approximately 0412 hours, CSC contacted the Joint Defense Operations Center (JDOC) for light fire team support on base, but was refused because the enemy forces were too close to friendly positions and the choppers could not distinguish between friendly and hostile positions.

17. At approximately 0415 hours, the 2nd Services Battalion Commander committed one platoon of his reaction forces with two U.S. Advisors to the 051 Gate Area. When the platoon arrived within 100 meters of the 051 Bunker (VN) it began to receive enemy fire from that bunker. A member of the platoon was dispatched in an attempt to determine whether the bunker was friendly or enemy. The soldier was wounded by small arms from the bunker and the remainder of the platoon immediately engaged the position. The enemy then turned the captured ARVN 57MM Recoilless Rifle onto the friendly position, fired two rounds and injured one U.S. Advisor and one member of the platoon.

18. At approximately 0422 hours, sector SAT (E-1) reported that they were pinned down about twenty meters Southwest of the 051 Bunker by heavy enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire.

19. Enemy pressure continued around the entire perimeter with hostile mortar or rocket rounds, small arms and automatic weapons fire, and physical probes at various locations.

One QRT and one SAT were deployed at the 055 Gate (extreme north end of the base) to reinforce ARVN personnel deployed in that area. One QRT and two SATs were

deployed at the northeast section of the POL Storage Area in reaction to intensified enemy fire in that area. One QRT was deployed at Gate #1 and Gate #2 (south perimeter of the base and Main Gate area) in reaction to enemy fire that was being directed into these positions from off-base sites. The third and uncommitted platoon of Task Force 35 was held in reserve at JDOC. An additional QRT was held in reserve in the eastern quadrant of the base in support of the heavily engaged units on the east and southeast perimeter. One QRT was deployed in support of ARVN personnel defending the 0-56 Gate (0-58 Bunker, northeast perimeter) which was receiving intense enemy fire from off-base positions. One rifle company (Task Force Peter) from MACV Annex was deployed on the southern flank of Gate #10 in response to the ground assault on MACV Annex and Gate #10 that was well in progress.

20. At approximately 0500 hours, Major Chieu (VNAF), the TSNSA Deputy Commander, arrived at Tango 3 with three light tanks and began firing into the enemy positions near the 0-51 Gate. Within fifteen minutes, two of the three tanks were destroyed by RPG-2 or RPG-7 rockets and the third was forced to withdraw to the east near the Old RMK Area. Major Chieu was wounded by one of the rocket explosions and evacuated.

21. At this point, an estimated reinforced battalion of enemy forces had penetrated the western perimeter and was maneuvering to flank the blocking forces in the area.

22. At approximately 0515 hours, several units in the blocking positions were running out of ammunition and requests for resupply were made. Resupply was accomplished by Security Police and Advisory Team personnel. The friendly units continued their intense small arms and automatic weapons fire into the enemy positions, causing heavy enemy casualties.

23. At approximately 0523 hours, TSN artillery received clearance to fire HE rounds into the enemy position west of the perimeter. At this time, 2nd Services Battalion 81mm mortars were also cleared to fire and engage the enemy outside the perimeter fence. The fire of both elements was directed to seal off the enemy penetration from west of highway 1.

24. At approximately 0529 hours, enemy troops were sighted by Tower #1 near the Alpha/Echo Sector line. CSC dispatched a Sector SAT and two QRTs to deploy on a line east and west, north of runway 25-L, to block any further enemy movement to the north.

At this point, the enemy had penetrated approximately 600 meters into the base in an area approximately 300 meters wide.

25. At approximately 0545 hours, the Senior Advisor Capital Military District advised the Senior Advisor TSNSA that Gen Ware was in command of all U.S. Forces in the CMD. Gen Ware immediately placed C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, under operational control of TSNSA. He further stated that the unit was enroute to assist and would be on the TSN Advisory Team command radio frequency.

26. At approximately 0551 hours, Tower #1 reported friendly units were making contact with enemy positions west of the base.

27. The 53rd R.F. Bn, upon returning to its camp, was advised that several hundred VC were moving west to east approximately 600 to 800 meters north of the Bn CP. The order to open fire from both northern CP Bunkers was given.

28. At approximately 0558 hours, two companies of the 8th Vietnamese Airborne Battalion arrived in the area of penetration to reinforce the blocking line and prepare for a counterattack.

29. At approximately 0603 hours, Tower #1 reported some of the enemy were withdrawing through a break in the perimeter fence south of the 0-51 Gate.

30. At approximately 0624 hours, the entire blocking force was subjected to an intense enemy rocket and mortar barrage.

31. At approximately 0630 hours, C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav (less one platoon) arrived in the area after fighting its way down Highway #1 from its base camp at Cu Chi, 20 miles NNW of TSN. They were employed in a flanking movement from the north and attacked the enemy assault force just outside the perimeter. This attack enabled the defense units countering the penetration to mount an internal counterattack.

32. At approximately 0635 hours, the counterattack began, with the two companies of Vietnamese Airborne in conjunction with U.S. military units located south, north, and east of the enemy positions. The initial drive met fierce resistance after advancing approximately 100 meters, and the Base Joint Defense Team was forced to hold and call in more support from artillery and the light fire teams.

33. From approximately 0635 hours to approximately 0730 hours, posts in Alpha, (northwest thru northeast) Bravo (East) and Foxtrot (South) Sectors reported small arms and automatic weapons fire coming onto the base. The counterattack moved slowly toward the west perimeter as the advancing friendly troops were pinned down frequently by heavy enemy fire.

34. At approximately 0645 hours, the 53rd R.F. Company reported that a VC Battalion had taken over the village of Tau Phu located at coordinates XS793854 and had surrounded the company CP located at XS794928. The 531 company commander, took a patrol out to check VC positions. He was subsequently killed, and the Viet Cong hung his body in front of the CP and cremated it. At approximately 0645 hours an element of 53rd R.F. Battalion moved out of the CP to the northwestern edge of the village of Ba Queo vicinity XS782946, less than 500 meters SSW of the 051 Bunker, and broke up what is believed to have been a reinforced two-company assault team. (A subsequent search of the area revealed 169 enemy bodies at coordinates XS785954).

35. At approximately 0715 hours, the 53/3 R.F Company reported being surrounded by a

large VC force. Assistance was requested and a LFT was allocated by JDOC. After three passes by the LFT the enemy withdrew northeast. A subsequent search of that area revealed 7 enemy KIA. It is believed that the enemy suffered more losses at this location at this time. Forty VC KIA were found approximately 200 meters north of this location. All had been hidden and stripped of all equipment.

36. At approximately 0730 hours, the remaining platoon of C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, arrived on the scene and was directed to enter the base through the O-55 Gate and proceed to the O-51 Gate in order to relieve the pressure on C Troop, which was intensively engaged.

37. At approximately 0725 hours, the defensive lines received a heavy concentration of enemy fire under which the enemy started another assault on the friendly counterattack line. They were unsuccessful. Heavy enemy fire followed this re-assault, which is now believed to have been utilized to cover the withdrawal of their wounded and part of the main force which 38. At approximately 0759 hours, Tower #1 reported mortar rounds were falling into the southern portion of the Airborne area. This action probably relates directly to the purpose mentioned in paragraph 38 above.

39. B Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav, plus an artillery battery from the 25th Inf Division arrived at the scene of the battle. They attacked the enemy flank from the north with all units on line just outside of the base perimeter. This action relieved the pressure of the penetration and completely occupied the enemy exploitation force.

40. During this time, with support from the Cav units and their artillery and constant fire support from Light Fire Teams, the counterattacking forces slowly gained momentum. As a result of this action, Tower #1 reported more enemy were trying to withdraw through the breach in the perimeter fence between the 0-51 Bunker and 0-51 Gate.

41. At approximately 0930 hours, the U.S. units on the north flank of the counterattack line successfully occupied the area from just south of the 0-51 Gate, north along the west perimeter. The units continued to draw small arms, automatic weapons, and rocket fire from the enemy positions just off the west perimeter for several hours.

42. The VN Airborne unit on the south flank of the counterattacking force continued to take heavy casualties and again started falling back. The 0-51 Bunker, in the possession of the enemy since early in the morning, was directing heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire into the southern flank.

43. At approximately 1000 hours, the Airborne unit withdrew to just north of Tower #3 and set up their defensive positions while the U.S. tanks from the 3/4 Cav and LFT attempted to knock out the 0-51 Bunker.

44. At approximately 1015 hours, one of the LFTs was reported shot down on the vast perimeter between the 0-52 and 0-52A Bunkers. Three LFTs were downed in the vicinity

of the vast perimeter during the morning battle.

45. At approximately 1210 hours, the 0-51 Bunker was successfully assaulted and neutralized by 377th Security Police Personnel after several attempts had previously failed. This was the last area inside the base perimeter held by the enemy. During this time, several sweeps were made within the area to the north to insure that no living enemy remained within the perimeter.

46. At approximately 1217 hours, the breach was closed and the perimeter was secured. Hostile fire was received from the enemy positions off the west end of the base for several hours.

47. Throughout the eight hour battle on the vast perimeter, heavy fighting continued at Gate #10 and MACV Annex. At approximately 1300 hours, these other areas were declared secured and a VC body count of 82+ was accredited.

48. At approximately 1400 hours, the 8th Airborne Battalion, (ARVN) the 1st Marine Bn (ARVN), and 4th Marine Battalion (ARVN) were committed by JDOC to attack and clear the depot area of Hong Tong Tay (adjacent to the NNE perimeter fence), which was under siege by heavy Viet Cong forces. The 8th Airborne Battalion was halted in the built up area southeast of Gate #10 approximately 500 meters from the base by intensive enemy fire. The 1st and 4th Marine Battalions continued the attack and secured the VN Armor Compound and the Co Loa Artillery Compound located in the Hong Tang Tay Area. Heavy enemy resistance was encountered which forced the three battalions to set up defensive positions just prior to nightfall.

49. The 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, was placed under the operational control of TSNSA. An attack plan was issued by JDOC placing the 3/4 Cav, the 53rd RF Battalion, and the reinforced base perimeter in blocking roles, with the 1/18th Inf Bn attacking the enemy in a north westerly direction. This action was designed to force the enemy's main body to disperse into the blocking forces. The enemy broke contact just before dark. The enemy had withdrawn to the southwest into Ba Queo and toward Phu Tho Hoa. FACs engaged the enemy with artillery fire whenever possible. The 3/4 Cav reported that it was receiving heavy small arms fire at a heavy rate from the VINATEXCO Factory. Clearance for an air strike was obtained and the first strike was conducted by the 33rd VNAF Wing. Subsequent strikes by F-100's resulted in 95% destruction of the factory. Secondary explosions occurred. Over 170 VC body count was accredited and a large weapons cache was located in and around the factory.

50. A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cav, 1st Division, the 2nd Battalion, 27th Regiment, 25th Inf Division, and the 2nd Battalion, 327th Regiment, 101st Airborne were placed under the operational control of TSNSA and the following defensive positions were established against the threat of another enemy attack. The positions were established in addition to the re-established and reinforced defensive perimeter posture of the primary defense forces:

- a. The 2/327/101st Airborne (less I company) - blocking position behind the 0-51 Gate area of penetration.
- b. The 1/18/1st Division (less I company) - placed in reserve in the southwest section of the base near the 25-L runway.
- c. The 2/27/25th Inf Division (less 1 company) - mobilized by the 377th Combat Support Group as a rapid reaction force stationed at the U.S. Army Heliport (southwest section of the base).
- d. The 3/4 Cav, 25th Inf Division with one company of the 2/27/25th Inf Division attached - positioned to the immediate south of the 0-56 Gate (058 Bunker) as a rapid reaction force against the enemy threat from the northwest.
- e. One company of the 2/327/101st and one company of the 1/18/1st Division placed in perimeter defense around MACV Headquarters. Disposition of the above elements was completed by 2100 hours. The base was considered secured at this time. At 2215 hours, Lt Col Coung resumed command of all Vietnamese forces and Colonel Thebeau with elements of headquarters, 2nd Brigade, 1st Inf Division, assumed command of all U.S. Army Forces by order of Major General Ware, Commander) II Field Force Forward.

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BATTLE ACRONYM'S

JDOC - Joint Defense Operation Center

ARVN - Army Republic Of Vietnam

TSNSA - Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area

TSN - Tan Son Nhut

O.F. - Perimeter Post Identifier

VNAF - Vietnamese Air Force

R.F. - Regional Forces

P.F. - Popular Forces

AFAT - Air Force Advisory Team

Task Force 35 - US Army Augmentation Forces From MACV Annex to 377th Security Police Squadron

Task Force Peter - US Army Augmentation Forces from MACV Annex In Support of MACV Compound

TACC - Tactical Air Control Center

A.K.A. - Also Known As

QRT - Quick Reaction Team

SAT - Security Alert Team

RSAT - Reserve Security Alert Team

L.F.T. - Light Fire Team

J.G.S. - Joint General Staff (South Vietnamese High Command)
C.P. - Command Post
CSC - Central Security Control
M.G. - Machine Gun
R.P.G. - Rocket Propelled Grenade
H.E. - High Explosive

Group - 4
Downgraded at 3 year intervals
Declassified after 12 years

(This Page is Unclassified)

Name: Chris Godfrey, **Oct 15, 2004**
Email: [Chris Godfrey](#)
URL:

Comments: Dear Sir,

I have visited (first time) your Tan Son Nhut Association web site. Very nice, and I read the After Action section which presented the after-actions report of the Tet Offensive against TSNAB with respect to the 377th SPS.

There is one noted mistake with regards to the staffing of the Security section make-up for the evening before the attack. The CSC make-up consisted of three (3) SATs, Golf-1, 2 and 3, and not only two SATs. Somehow Golf-3 was not identified as such in this report. Golf-3 was formed by direction of Captain DeNisio and Lt Grover the evening before the attack and was comprised of a Sgt (from CSC) and 2 Airmen (pulled from two sectors). Golf-3 had tactical responsibility of the outer perimeter road East end, including the POL area, C-130 parking area and north to the 056 gate. In the official after-actions report it is noted that the initial enemy in-coming fire was from the East perimeter and directed towards the C-130 ramp area. That is correct, but the radio notification to CSC was transmitted at about 0320 hours, and was transmitted by Golf-3. Several minutes later Capt DeNisio and Lt Grover arrived at Golf-3's location on the outer perimeter road. Lt Grover instructed Golf-3 to remain in position and engage the enemy as necessary. Following this they drove West towards the 051 gate as radio traffic identified a major ground assault at that location.

Having read the after-actions report (I have my own [onion skin] copy), I noticed no mention of a Golf 3 SAT. Rather, I believe that reference was made to a sector SAT regarding the initial enemy weapons fire. And that is a shame however, the

Security Alert Desk Blotter from CSC does reflect "Golf 3" in one entry.

It may appear that I know a lot about the Tet Offensive as do many others of my brothers who were there. However, my knowledge about Golf-3 is first hand as I was the G-3 Leader, Sgt Chris Godfrey. And yes, the day before the actual attack I was performing my assigned duty as Chief Clerk for "C" Flt Scty. After the 54 hour battle I returned to my (CSC) position which included supervising the three main towers and the early posting team, plus being the driver/RTO for the "C" Flt Scty Comdr (Lt) and Chief (MSgt), and a short stint as a map plotter in JDOC and Liaison to the 25th Infantry Division's Crater Analysis team during the numerous rocket attacks following Tet.

I'm glad to have found your TSNA web site. Thank you for your work on this.

Chris Godfrey
"C" Flt Scty, 377th SPS, 1967-1970

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