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IGSL

23 DEC 1966

Sentry Dogs (CSAF Msg 90318, 8 Dec 66)

Hq USAF (AFISPM)

KIA  
6-73

1. Following information is provided as requested in reference message:

a. At approximately 0115 hours, 4 December 1966, sentry dog REBEL, SN-519X and handler, A2C LEROY E. MARSH, AF12681006, detected a group of approximately 20 VC emerging from a ditch 75 yards distant. Airman Marsh notified CSC, released REBEL, and opened fire. REBEL attacked VC and was in turn killed, being found a few hours later.

b. At approximately 0200 hours, 4 December 1966, sentry dog CUBBY, SN-612E and handler, A2C LARRY G. LAUDNER, AF17677090, detected an unknown number of unidentified personnel approaching his post. His challenge was disregarded, CSC was advised, and CUBBY was released. There was a burst of gunfire and a few hours later CUBBY was found dead. The unidentified personnel were alleged to be a portion of the sapper unit attempting to escape.

c. At approximately 0500 hours, 4 December 1966, sentry dog TOBY, SN-206F, and handler, A1C DALE E. SIDWELL, AF18601157, detected unidentified personnel entering a clump of bushes on his post. CSC was advised and instructed the team to investigate. When the team advanced, an individual ran from the bushes and failed to heed the challenge. TOBY was released, made contact with the VC, but was subsequently killed. The VC then opened fire on Airman Sidwell, fire was returned and the VC was killed.

2. No awards have been recommended for the above actions, pending full and complete documentation of respective actions.

3. Reference is made to 7AF Confidential message IGSL 64180, 11 Dec, subject: Attack on Tan Son Nhut, 4-5 Dec, in which it was reported that A2C George Bevich and his dog were killed. It has since been learned that A2C Bevich's dog was wounded.

FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

SIGNED

JACK H. McCREERY, Colonel, USAF

Deputy Inspector General

MR: Hq USAF (AFISPM) requested names and serial numbers of sentry dogs KIA and names and serial numbers of their handlers during latest VC attack on TSN.

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NOTE: An accurate inventory of captured weapons could not be compiled due to seizure of such materiel by VNAF authorities who subsequently refused to provide any information on either the number or type of weapons thus acquired.

13. (C) (Gp-4) Plans:

a. 377th Air Police Squadron. As in the case of the 13 April 1966 attack, the successful response of the 377th Air Police Squadron to the attack of 4 December 1966 can be attributed to the effectiveness of procedures contained in Squadron Regulation 207-4, "Security Rapid Reaction Plan". This local directive, through practice exercises and personnel indoctrination, has proven capable of insuring the mobilization and deployment of the entire squadron in a maximum of thirty minutes. The regulation is designated to be as simple and practical as possible, and is based on the assumption that there will be no reliable prior warning of any attack; that no attack on TSN will be of prolonged duration; that minimum response time of the maximum number of Air Police personnel is the decisive element; and that the precise nature of any threat and the appropriate counter measure can only be determined at the time of the attack.

b. US Forces.

(1) During the 4 December 1966 attack, Air Police forces and Task Force 35 reacted smoothly and rapidly, and were successful in blocking the main penetration/escape route used by the VC. Although the precise location of this route was unknown at the time, the deployment of available forces to the West perimeter, which resulted in this blocking effect, was neither random nor accidental. On 16 October 1966, an attack plan for US Quick Reaction Forces developed jointly by the 377th Air Police Squadron and Special Troops, USARV, established a series of contingency options based on recognized routes of approach available to the enemy. These options established general guidelines for the reaction of US Forces to attacks from these routes. Option B of that plan considered VC penetration from a point on the west perimeter, and established guidelines for the deployment of Air Police and Task Force 35 forces to counter such an attack. Based on sentry dog alerts and the apparent movement of the VC on 4 December 1966, the likelihood of a penetration from the west was considered most probable, and US Forces were deployed in accordance with the guidelines of the plan.

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(2) The Joint US Forces Defense Plan 1-66, dated 1 October 1966 which integrates and coordinates defense actions of the 377th Air Police Squadron and Special troops, USARV proved sound and served the purpose for which it was intended. The formal USAF support plan for the joint plan has been published at the direction of Headquarters 7AF.

c. US-RVN Forces. At present there is no effective plan for the coordination of all US and RVN forces with a responsibility for base defense. This is not due to inaction. US Forces have reached agreement on their portion of this responsibility in the form of the Joint US Forces Defense Plan. Vietnamese Forces, VNAF and ARVN, have developed an RVNAF Base Defense Plan and have established a unified command, the Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area. Utilizing these two plans, US and RVN, as a point of departure it now remains to reach agreement on a single combined plan which will provide an effective base defense system. (A coordinated plan is currently being prepared for review by all TSN forces in conjunction with the USAF - Advisory Group.)

14. (C) (Gp-4) Special Equipment and Techniques:

a. Sentry Dogs. A sentry dog team was the first element of the Air Police forces to detect the presence of VC within the interior of the base. Due to the nature of the terrain chosen by the VC for their approach route and the direction of the prevailing winds in relation thereto, it was possible for the assault force to pass through two sentry dog posts before being detected on a third post. It is apparent that the effectiveness of the sentry dogs along the penetration route could be enhanced.

b. Grenade Launcher, M-79. Although twelve of these weapons were available for use, none were employed. This circumstance arises from the fact that targets were consistently not detected until Air Police were within less than safe minimum range for this weapon. As a consequence hand grenades were issued for use in search and destroy operations.

c. Shotgun, Model 77, 12 Gauge Stevens Pump (Savage). This weapon, an old item in the inventory, proved conclusively unsatisfactory. Three of these weapons, issued to Air Police posted in aircraft revetments jammed, thereby preventing VC who had penetrated this area from being taken under fire. This deficiency has long been recognized and replacement 12 gauge Winchester Pump, riot type shotguns have been on order since May 1966.

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d. Rifle, 5.56MM, M-16. Without exception, sentry dog handlers consider the present position of the sling on this weapon to be unsatisfactory. All would prefer that the sling be attached to the top rather than the under side of this weapon. With the sling attached in this fashion the weapon can be slung from the left shoulder and carried in a firing position on the right side of the body, thereby simplifying the handler's task of managing a dog while maintaining an alert attitude. Local maintenance shops are currently attempting to devise a means of effecting this change in the position of the sling without any modification of the weapon.

e. Bayonet. It became readily apparent in the course of search and destroy operations that a bayonet attached to the M-16 rifle would have been most useful. Requisition action has been initiated to obtain a bayonet for each M-16 rifle authorized.

15. (C) (Op-4) Commander's Analysis: The VC attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base on 4 December 1966 was the largest such action directed against a USAF facility in the Republic of Vietnam since the beginning of hostilities. The effective reaction by US Forces in general and 377th Air Police Squadron in particular was successful both in limiting the amount of damage to US resources and in killing or capturing almost the total VC assault force. Inasmuch as prisoner interrogations revealed that the purpose of the attack was to prove the VC were winning and to heighten morale of VC soldiers and cadres, the outcome can only be construed as a decisive VC defeat, both psychologically and militarily. Lessons learned from this action include the following:

a. RVNAP responsible for external defense have not yet attained a reliable capability to detect hostile forces moving against the base. Nor can the RVNAP, responsible for perimeter defense, be relied upon. Hence the effective defense of Tan Son Nhut necessarily rests with the US Forces.

b. Reliable prior warning is unlikely and defense plans must provide for such contingency.

c. A rapid and effective quick reaction capability is the decisive factor and within the US AF this can be provided only by the Air Police.

d. During this attack, only Air Police forces were involved in actual engagement with the enemy on the Air Base. Although over 6,000 rounds were expended, no injuries were inflicted on friendly forces. This fire control discipline cannot be expected from augmentation personnel, a reality which in part explains our reluctance to employ such personnel

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in base defense operations except as a last resort.

e. Ordnance and munitions captured by US Forces should be retained for proper evaluation by US technical intelligence agencies. Efforts by non-US personnel to seize this equipment should be resisted until further intelligence value has been gained by US agencies.

f. Effective utilization of sentry dogs under condition of broken terrain, dense ground cover and unfavorable winds requires, where feasible, that posts be established in depth so that hostile forces approaching from any direction must cross a number of posts, thereby increasing the probability of detection.

g. Maximum destruction of all ground cover by burning, defoliation or scraping the surface is essential to deprive enemy forces of a natural means for concealment. Fence lines in particular should be cleared of vegetation and should be properly illuminated to reduce the opportunity for undetected penetration of the wire.

h. Difficulties were encountered by Central Security Control in maintaining an accurate log of events as they occurred. This problem will be met in the future by use of a tape recorder which is to be installed in the control room for recording emergency operations.

i. When air-dropped flares were not available, M-127 illumination nap flares were employed in large number to provide required illumination. The available base reserve stock of this item was nearly depleted in one night's operation, pointing to a need for a large emergency store of these flares at all 7th Air Force Bases. (A large supply is en route and should be in place by 1 January 1967.)

j. Only general overall direction of Air Police operations can be provided by CSC in an engagement of this type. Detailed direction and coordination must be exercised by officers and senior NCO's on the scene.

k. A major problem in coordinating US/PVN defense actions arises from command posts/communications centers maintained under the Vietnamese concept. Vietnamese personnel, officers and enlisted men, assigned to these centers during non-duty hours are frequently unavailable. Consequently, they are not knowledgeable of the situation, and when called upon for information or decisions are confused. Some command posts maintained for status purposes are useless due to lack of communications equipment, and their senior personnel appear offended if bypassed.

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during emergency conditions. Once the new hardened Joint Command Post is completed this should eliminate much of the confusion and misunderstanding.

l. Air Police training has traditionally been directed toward effective static defense, with small mobile strike forces for response to affected areas. The attack of 4 December 1966 demonstrated that Air Police in this theater can become involved in a typical infantry engagement for which their training is minimal. Although radio contact with QRF's and the combat experience of a few well-placed individuals resulted in a safe, effective search-and-destroy operation, general infantry training for all Air Police would have been of great value. Primary training needed is in squad tactics, employment of automatic weapons and hand grenades, and proper approach and deployment from vehicles.

m. Enemy penetration of the MLR and the aircraft parking area is attributed to the following: Extinguishment of all airfield lights upon initiation of the attack; inoperative condition of the low intensity lighting along concertina wire barrier due to lack of parts; small size and light weight of VC which facilitated penetration of concertina wire; jamming of weapon on Post 15; unmanned status of Post 43; and openings between revetments. Corrective action taken or in progress includes: Defoliation of concertina fence line; strengthening of concertina fence; renewed emphasis on weapons maintenance; repair of low intensity lighting; and closing of openings between revetments.

n. Once the VC have lost their leader(s), the discipline and direction of their operation deteriorates rapidly and there is no longer a single, disciplined force with which to contend.

#### 16. (U) SOURCES:

a. Air Police Security Blotter (AF Form 53), 377th Air Police Squadron, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, 0501, 3 December to 1215, 5 December 1966. (U)

b. Air Police Alert Blotter (AF Form 53), 377th Air Police Squadron, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, 0110-1000, 4 December 1966. (U)

c. Air Police Security Blotter (AF Form 53), 377th Air Police Squadron, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, 1100, 5 December to 0800, 6 December 1966. (U)

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- d. Air Police Blotter (AF Form 53) for Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Point (Joint Command Post), 377th Air Police Squadron, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, 0545, 3 December to 1600, 4 December 1966. (U)
- e. Operations Journal, Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Area, 1700, 3 December to 1515, 5 December 1966. (U)
- f. Air Police Blotter (AF Form 53) for Tan Son Nhut Sensitive Point (Joint Command Post), 377th Air Police Squadron, 1600, 4 December to 0620, 5 December 1966. (U)
- g. Combined Military Interrogation Center Special Report, RVNAF Report Number 0912/TTTVHH/OT, 5 December 1966. (C)
- h. Report of Investigation, Viet Cong (VC), Initial Results of VC Prisoner Interrogation, Tan Son Nhut Air Base Attack (U), Report Number 1 655 0347 66, 50D OSI, 7 December 1966. (S)
- i. Report of Investigation, Viet Cong (VC), VC Attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base (U), Report Number 1 655 0334 66, 50D OSI, 7 December 1966. (S)
- j. Surface Weather Observation, SC Form 444, Detachment 2, 30th Weather Squadron, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, 4 December 1966. (U)
- k. Tan Son Nhut Base Operations NOTAM Report, 031207, 4 December 1966. (U)
- l. Letter, 377th Combat Support Group (BSO), Damage Report and Recovered Munitions, (not dated). (C)
- m. Explosive-Ordnance-Demolition Log of Events, 377th Munitions Maintenance Squadron, 0130-1630, 4 December 1966. (U)
- n. Scramble/Divert Log, 4 December 1966, Tactical Air Control Center, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN. (U)
- o. Tactical Air Operations Log, 4-5 December 1966, Tactical Air Control Center, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN. (U)
- p. 460th Tactical Recon. Wing Message, DCMMC, 01216 December 1966, Damage Report, RCS: AF-A45 (7AF-1), 8 December 1966. (S)
- q. 377th Air Police Squadron, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN.

r. After Operations Statement, Major James S. Cronen, 3rd Platoon Commander, 120th Aviation Company, Capital Aviation Battalion, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN. (U)

s. Counter-Mortar Radar Journal, 79th Artil. Detachment, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, 4 December 1966. (U)

t. Memo For Record, Recovered Munitions Items, 4-5 December 1966, Explosive Ordnance Demolition Branch, 377th Munitions Maintenance Squadron, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, 5 December 1966. (U)

u. Memorandum For the Record, After Action Report of VC Attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base, 3-4 December 1966, Headquarters Special Troops, USARV, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN, 19 December 1966. (C)

v. Patrol Squadron 17, Commander Task Group 115.6, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN.

w. Oceanographic Air Survey Unit Detachment, Western Pacific, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN.



GROVER K. COE, Colonel, USAF  
Commander

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1. Map of TSN AB with key, (C) (1 cy)
  2. Detail "A" to atch 1, (C) (1 cy)
  3. Map, Saigon and TSN AB, (C) (1 cy)
  4. Map, TSN AB Canine areas, (U)
  5. Diagram, Damaged Aircraft parking positions (S) (1 cy)
  6. Photographs with caption sheet (U)