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TET OFFENSIVE - 1968

Preparations for the TET Offensive of 1968 got underway in some areas of South Vietnam during October 1967, about the time that the Communists were preparing for more pointed activity in three widely separated areas of the country-- Khe Sanh (Quang Tri Province), Dak To (Kontum Province), and in areas of Military Region 10. At the same time an SOI change involving two of the three divisions (VC 5th and NVA 7th) in Nam Bo had been effected and the other Communist division there (the VC 9th) was ceasing to communicate regularly with its regiments. As the Khe Sanh and Dak To threats were met and subsided, SIGINT evidenced preparations for Vietnamese Communist action of unprecedented proportions--progressing slowly and differing greatly from anything in the past. Many units were concentrated in Cambodia and instability was the common characteristic of most units during the last two months of 1967.

During the first two weeks of January 1968, as some units accomplished long distance moves and others held positions they had settled into weeks before, a rash of low-grade cryptosystems began appearing in communications serving units in I and II Corps. Units were resubordinated

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to other commands in the DMZ area, division forward elements were activated in Military Region 5, units were alerted to adhere strictly to established regulations, and additional schedules were established. Readable messages revealed discussions of D-Day, increased reconnaissance of Allied defenses and positions, and evidence of prolonged tactical operations. A flurry of translations were published by the field stations and NSA during the week of 17-23 January, which reflected the seriousness of the Communist threat, and on 24 January, NSA issued three reports dealing with the situation in MR 5 (2/O/VCM/R27-68, R28, and R-29-68). Hue, Pleiku, and Kontum emerged as the most seriously threatened cities with considerable attention focused on many other populated centers whose common bond was the presence of major Allied installations in the area.

As references to D-Day and other discussions of timing unfolded, though in the context of a particular separate military command, all the evidence pointed toward the same general time span--late January or early February. By 25 January it had become absolutely clear from SIGINT that the Vietnamese Communists in South Vietnam were

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preparing to simultaneously conduct attacks in most areas of the country with major cities and populated centers as their principal targets. On that date (at 2332Z) the first of the 2/O/VCM/R32-68 series reports (copy attached) was published, followed on successive days by 44 follow-ups as the major thrust came and receded, and as new attacks were indicated. Many of the follow-on reports contained information indicating generally when the major attacks would come, but one in particular - 2/O/VCM/R40-68, 280038Z January (copy attached) - discussed a message of 28 January which stated that the attack is to commence "as soon as possible" but not later than 0030 hours (Saigon time) on 30 January.

According to cumulative collateral, the Vietnamese Communist TET offensive of 1968 was launched on 30/31 January against government and U. S. facilities in almost every provincial city and surrounding area thereof throughout South Vietnam. The U. S. Army headquarters at Hue was one of the major targets and parts of that city were in the hands of the Communists on the morning of 1 February. Collateral sources further stated that 58,000 Communist main and local forces were committed in attacks on urban and military installations through 13 February. Communist

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casualty figures during the period 29 January to 2 February were set at 12,704 killed in action and 3,576 detained.

REFERENCES: 2/O/VCM/R32-68 - TAB A
2/O/VCM/R40-68 - TAB B

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