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THE TET OFFENSIVE

I. INTRODUCTION

On the night of 29-30 January 1968, during the proclaimed truce period established for the Tet holiday season, Vietnamese Communist units delivered a devastating series of attacks against Allied governmental and military targets in population centers throughout the ARVN II Corps area. The following night, major attacks were conducted against urban centers throughout South Vietnam, as the Tet offensive reached peak intensity. Additional targets were struck on the night of 31 January-1 February. During the next few days, several more targets were attacked, and fighting continued in some cities attacked during the first wave. However, by the end of the first week of February, the Tet offensive was largely over.

The original attacks of 30 and 31 January had been primarily directed against urban centers and civilian governmental targets. A number of the best PAVN and VC units had been withheld from these attacks, but remained near key Allied positions, poised to engage Allied reaction forces

or follow up the original assaults with a fresh wave of attacks. On 1 February and in the succeeding few days, some of these elements were committed as the enemy sought to press advantages gained in the initial stages of the offensive. However, the hoped-for general uprising did not take place, and Allied forces reacted swiftly to the initial assaults. A considerable portion of the enemy force remained uncommitted; those attacks which did take place after the first wave were generally unsuccessful, as Allied forces were able to expel the attackers almost immediately in most areas.

The Vietnamese Communist violation of the traditional lunar New Year pause in hostilities was not unprecedented in Vietnamese history. In 1789, a Vietnamese army led by Nguyen Hue delivered an attack during Tet against a totally unsuspecting and unprepared Chinese army which had siezed Hanoi. Aided by complete tactical surprise and the temporarily poor fighting condition of the Chinese soldiers, Nguyen Hue's army routed the invaders and drove them from Hanoi. However, the Tet offensive marked the first time that Vietnamese had ever attacked Vietnamese during the Tet holidays.

Although considerable evidence pointing to attacks during Tet had been available in advance, the Communists achieved a measure of tactical

surprise in many areas, chiefly because of the unprecedented scope and nature of their attacks. A CIA Intelligence Memorandum, dated 21 February 1968, discussed the Tet attacks during the 30 January-13 February period.

In describing the scope of the enemy offensive, the memorandum observed that urban centers were the principal targets:

"The intensity of the Communist Tet offensive is reflected in the fact that 39 of South Vietnam's 44 provincial capitals, plus the autonomous cities of Danang and Saigon were attacked. All of them were subjected to artillery and mortar fire or ground assault, and most of them were hit within the first three days. At least 35 of these capitals and the two autonomous cities were physically penetrated by Communist armed forces. In addition, at least 71 district capitals were also attacked. The offensive was aimed at civilian centers of authority, as well as military installations such as base camps, air fields, and logistical facilities. ..."

The memorandum summarized enemy objectives as follows:

"... As a maximum objective, the Communists hoped the campaign would culminate in a general uprising which would involve severe defeats for Allied military forces and would lead to US withdrawal from South Vietnam. At the same time, they also hoped that large-scale political agitation combined with attacks on urban areas would result in the collapse of the South Vietnamese government ..."

The Tet offensive also has several more immediate tactical objectives: (1) to disperse and tie down Allied military units in defensive positions, (2) to disrupt South Vietnamese centers of political authority, and (3) to demonstrate the inability of the South Vietnamese government to protect the population. In addition, the Communists may be attempting to gain greater control over a larger segment of the rural population by disrupting or destroying the pacification program while Allied forces are diverted to the protection of urban areas. ..."

The memorandum then assessed enemy gains. Although the Communists had failed to spark a general uprising, they had disrupted the South Vietnamese governmental apparatus; interrupted the pacification program;

and pointed up the inability of the government to protect the people. 4

Despite these gains, the memorandum continued, the Communists had failed to organize significant popular support. In addition, they had suffered severe losses, particularly among elite sapper and special action units.

Although the official casualty total of 32,549 enemy dead was exaggerated, losses had been heavy. Allied dead were listed as 3,383, and Allied forces captured nearly 8,000 individual weapons and over 1,200 crew served weapons during the Tet attacks.

The memorandum estimated that perhaps 58,000 enemy troops took part in Tet attacks throughout South Vietnam. It notes that this figure is probably far short of the actual number of enemy troops committed, inasmuch as many local units were built up just prior to the Tet attacks, while other participating units were new, or otherwise unidentified.

SIGINT and evidence from other collateral sources indicate that many units not mentioned in the CIA memorandum were involved in the Tet offensive. Thus, the figure of 58,000 is far lower than the actual total of enemy troops committed to battle during Tet.

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CIA Intelligence Memorandum, Communist Units Participating in Attacks During Tet Offensive 30 January Through 13 February 1968 21 February 1968

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Given the confused nature of the fighting, and the closeness to events, order of battle designations contained in the CIA memorandum are, of necessity, incomplete. There are some discrepancies between collateral holdings on enemy units which took part in Tet attacks. In some cases, this chapter has been able to resolve them, and in general, information on the activities of major PAVN and VC units during the period is fairly reliable. Identification of local forces and auxiliary guerilla units involved is definitely incomplete and imprecise. Information on enemy order of battle dispositions during the Tet attacks represents a synthesis of the limited available collateral.

The provincial maps which accompany summaries of Tet attacks in various areas were compiled from information contained in the CIA memorandum. Cities attacked during the 30 January-13 February period are designated by an "X". These maps are somewhat misleading. Since the memorandum was issued just three weeks after the start of the Tet offen-

~~TOP SECRET~~

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~~TOP SECRET~~

sive, it includes some attacks which should not, in retrospect, be considered part of that offensive. The CIA memorandum includes all attacks which took place between 30 January and 13 February as part of the offensive. The cutoff point of 13 February does not mean that CIA analysts believed at the time that the Tet offensive was terminated on that date; it represents the effective date of their information. In addition, in a number of cases, the urban center itself was not attacked; an installation in the immediate vicinity was the target. The maps make no such distinction. In contrast, attacks on targets not in the immediate vicinity of provincial and district capitals were generally omitted. One example of this is the 31 January shelling of USM-808 and US Marine installations at Phu Bai. These attacks were numerous and widespread. Thus, the maps provide a somewhat distorted view of the Tet attacks, by focusing attention only on attacks in or around major administrative headquarters, and ignoring those in other areas. Nevertheless, the maps do provide an excellent guide to the overall scope of the enemy offensive.

This chapter will survey the SIGINT information provided during the period preceding the Tet attacks, and attempt to assess its ability to provide advance warning of the enemy offensive. (Unlike other chapters, which focus on a particular geographical area or Corps zone,) this treatment will review events in all areas of Vietnam. The enemy buildup near Khe Sanh, and the subsequent siege of that base are omitted. That subject will be considered in a separate chapter, but in any case, this chapter has made an arbitrary distinction between events in the immediate DMZ area and those elsewhere in Vietnam. Events in the Khe Sanh area and those which took place in the eastern DMZ area are not covered in this review of the Tet offensive. As indicated, this is, perhaps, an arbitrary distinction, but events in the DMZ area appear to have their own tempo. Obviously, the siege of Khe Sanh was related to the Tet offensive. The North Vietnamese commenced tactical activity in the Khe Sanh area on 20 January, just ten days prior to the start of the Tet attacks, and in the eastern DMZ area, enemy units conducted aggressive activity north of the Marine defensive line of Camp Carroll-Cam Lo-Gio Linh. These campaigns were related, in that activity in one area limited Allied options in other areas, but they were distinct. Perhaps a comparable situation existed in our own Civil War, in 1864. While Sherman was driving through Georgia,

Grant was maneuvering in the Washington-Richmond corridor. These were two separate, but closely related campaigns, both in ultimate objective, and insofar as each prevented the Confederacy from taking adequate measures to oppose the other.

The treatment of events leading up to the Tet offensive is primarily designed to portray the intelligence picture presented to SIGINT consumers prior to the Tet attacks, with emphasis on the intelligence indicators which warned of forthcoming attacks. Interpretation and interpolation have been minimized, for the focus is strictly on the information available to SIGINT consumers at the time, and the interpretation given to this information at that time. This section concludes at a point immediately preceding the Tet attacks. Next, the Tet attacks are reviewed, area by area, along with SIGINT information predicting attacks which took place immediately following the initial wave. Finally, the post-Tet period is summarized, bringing the narrative to mid-February when a smaller round of assaults and shellings struck 21 major targets. In view of the considerable controversy which later developed concerning an alleged "intelligence gap", this chapter concludes with an assessment of the role of SIGINT in providing pre-Tet intelligence warnings. Two relevant documents are reviewed and discussed in detail- a draft document prepared by a

USIB board which investigated the pre-Tet intelligence posture, and an evaluation later prepared for the President by his Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

## II. THE PRE-TET PERIOD

The pre-Tet period has been divided into two parts in this treatment.

The first part covers activity prior to 25 January, when NSA published a lengthy report warning of an imminent coordinated offensive throughout South Vietnam. The second part details SIGINT information and enemy activities from 25 January to a point immediately preceding the start of the Tet attacks.

This division has been made because the focus of SIGINT reporting changed as of 25 January. From that point, the SIGINT community, alerted to the probability of an imminent, widespread offensive, concentrated on developing additional information on that offensive, in an effort to ascertain its nature, timing and objectives.

### A. PRE-TET ACTIVITY PRIOR TO 25 JANUARY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first indications of major enemy activity in MR 5 were received on 13 January, when two unidentified elements in Pleiku Province referenced "N-Day" in a message. "N-Day" is the Vietnamese Communist equivalent of "D-Day". Within a few days, SIGINT analysts noted a growing cluster of enemy elements in two separate areas in the western highlands. The first, in the tri-border area of Kontum Province, Laos and Cambodia, included Hq, B3 Front; Hd, PAVN 1st Division and its Military Intelligence Section (MIS); and the PAVN 32nd, 66th and 174th Regiments. The second concentration was developing in the Kontum-Pleiku Province border area. On 16 January, a B3 Front Headquarters authority detailed plans for enemy action in Pleiku Province to a 1st Division headquarters element within Pleiku Province. Messages exchanged between these two headquarters played a significant part in SIGINT reporting before, during and after the Tet attacks.

During the next several days, these elements passed other messages dealing with planned attacks in Pleiku Province, and Allied installations in the Pleiku city area were struck repeatedly by enemy fire attacks between 19 and 27 January.

The concentration of enemy troops in the tri-border area of Laos, Cambodia and Kontum continued to grow, and by 22 January, the PAVN 24th Regiment had joined this concentration. In addition, another cluster of enemy elements was building in Darlac Province. During the remaining few days prior to 25 January, there were frequent references to "N-Day", and continued strong indications that enemy activity in the B3 Front area was imminent.

In contrast to the considerable evidence pointing to major hostile activity in the B3 Front area of Kontum, Pleiku and Darlac Provinces, little evidence accumulated pointing to similar activity in the PAVN 3rd Division area in Binh Dinh Province, or the Southern Front/PAVN 5th Division area in Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa and Phu Bon. However, in the Quang Nam-Quang Tin area, SIGINT reflected the repositioning of PAVN 2nd Division elements toward the coast in mid-January. On 24 January, NSA warned of impending hostile action throughout the coastal provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa, based on a message passed by Hq, MR 5. By this time, references to "N-Day" had appeared on a communications facility serving the PAVN 2nd Division; the PAVN 368B and 68th Artillery Regiments; and the 402nd Sapper Battalion. References to "N-Day" in this area and in the B3 Front area provided the first indications of a coordinated offensive.

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Activity in Military Region Tri Thien Hue (MR TTH) in early January was highlighted by the emergence of the Forward Element, MR TTH as a major authority. By 21 January, this headquarters had relocated to a position just ten kilometers from Hue, and was communicating with up to ten subordinates, including the PAVN 4th, 6th and 9th Regiments.

On 23 January, SIGINT product alerted consumers to a potential enemy thrust at Hue. Major enemy elements were now gathering near Hue, including Hq, MR TTH and its Forward Element, and the PAVN 6th Regiment.

Activity in the ARVN III Corps area prior to 25 January was highlighted by the resumption of intelligence reporting by MI elements serving the VC 5th and 9th Divisions, and a continuing expansion of communications in the area. VC 5th Division MI elements had resumed intelligence collection activities on 6 January, after having been virtually inactive since 12

September 1967. The focus of 5th Division interest was southern ~~Dinh~~ <sup>Phuoc Long</sup>

Province. VC 9th Division MI elements also resumed intelligence reporting on 6 January 1968, after a silence of several weeks. Elements of the C95 Reconnaissance Company, a 9th Division subordinate, began intelligence collection activities in northeast Tay Ninh Province. Also active in that area was the 46th Sapper-Reconnaissance Battalion, which was feeding intelligence information to its parent headquarters, Military Intelligence

Bureau, COSVN.

During January, several communications groups controlled by major new control authorities continued to expand. Most of these groups were first activated in October 1967, and their subscribers included elements of all three divisions in III CTZ, including the VC 5th and 9th and the PAVN 7th Division. One of the new groups served a major front headquarters in Binh Long Province; another was controlled by a detached element of the VC 5th Division headquarters; two more were closely associated with the PAVN 7th Division.

The activity described in the preceding paragraphs led SIGINT analysts to conclude that the Communists were planning a massive coordinated offensive, and prompted NSA to issue its report to that effect on 25 January.

## 2. MILITARY REGION 5

### a. PAVN B3 FRONT AREA

#### 40TH ARTILLERY REGIMENT SHELLS DAK TO, 3, 4 AND 5 JANUARY

During early January 1968, enemy intelligence elements in Kontum Province were engaged in preparations for a series of fire attacks on Dak To Airfield. The 1 January SEAS reviewed several USM-60A translations of messages exchanged by military intelligence elements of the PAVN 1st Division,

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which indicated that the first of two attacks was scheduled for 1700 hours, local time, on 2 January. A 1 January message from the Military Intelligence Section (MIS), PAVN 1st Division to a subordinate which had been activated in late December revealed that the enemy intended to fire on an ARVN Airborne unit on 3 January, when it was forming up at Dak To Airfield prior to being airlifted to Saigon. This subordinate later sent messages to MIS, 1st Division addressed from "K-13", possibly the 13th Air Defense Battalion. Collateral holdings indicate that the 13th Air Defense Battalion is subordinate to the PAVN 1st Division.

The 3 January SEAS provided further indications of forthcoming fire attacks on Dak To Airfield. The MIS, 1st Division again ordered its subordinate to fire on an ARVN Airborne battle group of three battalions, scheduled to leave for Saigon on 3 January. Meanwhile, another MI element reported to MIS, 1st Division about Allied dispositions in the Dak To area.

SEAS for 4 January highlighted a message from the MI element near Dak To to the MIS, 1st Division. The MI element reported that it was having problems in organizing fire attacks on Dak To as a result of Allied strafing and bombing. Earlier, this subordinate had reported that K-13 (possibly the 13th Air Defense Battalion) had taken five rounds in its assembly area.

15

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3/0/STY/R01-68 1 Jan 68; 103-68 3 Jan 68; 104-68 4 Jan 68

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Elements of the 70th Artillery Regiment shelled Dak To Airfield on 3, 4 and 5 January. During the next few days, the MI element possibly associated with the 13th Air Defense Battalion reported to the MIS, 1st Division on the extreme difficulties posed by Allied air and artillery bombardment and defoliation. Possibly, these difficulties accounted for the termination of shelling after 5 January, despite the MI element's attempts to organize further fire attacks.

TACTICAL ACTIVITY IN B3 FRONT AREA IN FIRST HALF OF JANUARY

, During this period, enemy activity was confined to fire attacks and the ambush of convoys. As described in the preceding paragraphs, Dak To Airfield was shelled on 3, 4 and 5 January. On 10 January, Kontum Airfield was mortared while the VC 304th Battalion attacked it with satchel charges. Allied forces suffered 13 killed and 21 wounded in the assault. Four aircraft were destroyed and eleven damaged. On 14 and 15 January, Ben Het Fire Support Base, a prime focus of enemy interest in the Dak To area since the end of the Dak To campaign in November 1967, received a total of 99 rounds of 82 millimeter recoilless rifle fire. On 15 January, two

separate Allied convoys were ambushed. The 4th Battalion, 24th Regiment ambushed a convoy on route 14 in Kontum Province, and elements of the 5th Battalion, 95B Regiment and the VC H-15 Local Force Battalion ambushed a 40 vehicle convoy in eastern Pleiku, destroying five tankers and two trucks.

FORWARD TACTICAL ELEMENT, 1ST DIVISION AND B3 FRONT HEADQUARTERS, PLEIKU SPLIT

During this period, enemy communications reflected a modification of their command structure in Pleiku Province. The 2 January SEAS noted that the Forward Tactical Element, PAVN 1st Division had effected a split in mid-December 1967. One element was operating with the division headquarters in Kontum, and communicating with Hq, B3 Front, the 66th and 174th regiments, and an unidentified suspected artillery unit. The other element was activated in northwest Pleiku, and communicated with Hq, B3 Front and the 32nd Regiment.

The 10 January SEAS noted a similar split by the B3 Front Headquarters, Pleiku Province. In addition to the reorganization of the command structure, possible moves by B3 Front combat elements were also suggested in the 10 January SEAS. The PAVN 66th Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 95B Regiment had been inactive in communications since 1 and 3 January respectively. In the past, the SEAS commented, similar silences have indicated moves by the involved units.

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3/0/STY/R02-68 2 January 1968; 3/0/STY/R09-68 10 January 1968

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FIRST REFERENCE TO "N-DAY" NOTED, 13 JANUARY 1968

On 13 January, the SEAS noted that two unidentified elements in Pleiku Province had exchanged a message containing references to "N-Day", the Vietnamese equivalent of "D-Day". In this case, the key day was "N-Plus 4 Day", according to the message.

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3/0/STY/R12-68 13 January 1968

CONCENTRATIONS OF ENEMY ELEMENTS DEVELOP IN TRI-BORDER AREA AND PLEIKU

In mid-January, the concentration of enemy elements in the tri-border area of Cambodia, Laos and Kontum Province was augmented by the arrival of the PAVN 32nd Regiment from Pleiku Province in mid-January. The 15 January SEAS revealed that the 32nd Regiment had effected a relocation of approximately 37 kilometers between 2 and 14 January, and was now in the tri-border area. Concurrent with the move, the 32nd Regiment reestablished communications with Hq, 1st Division on 12 January, and ceased communications with the Forward Tactical Element, 1st Division, Pleiku Province as of 9 January. The 32nd Regiment had not communicated with Hq, 1st Division since 7 December 1967.

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The 16 January SEAS noted that the 32nd Regiment was within a few kilometers of a growing concentration of enemy elements in the tri-border area, including Hq, B3 Front, Kontum Province; Hq, PAVN 1st Division; MIS, PAVN 1st Division and one subordinate MI element; Hq, Forward Tactical Element, PAVN 1st Division; and the 66th and 174th Regiments.

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3/O/STY/A13-68 15 Jan 68; 3/O/STY/R14-68 16 Jan 68

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In addition to the concentration of enemy elements in the tri-border area of Cambodia, Laos and Kontum Province, another cluster of enemy elements developed in northwestern Pleiku Province. The 17 January SEAS warned of a growing concentration of enemy elements in the Pleiku-Kontum Province border area. This concentration included an element of Hq, B3 Front, Pleiku Province; the Gia Lam (Pleiku) Provincial Unit; the subordinate Forward Tactical Element, PAVN 1st Division, which relocated to that area by 15 January; and several unidentified elements. In addition, the SEAS noted that the Forward Element, PAVN 1st Division had joined the concentration in the tri-border area by 16 January.

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3/O/STY/A15-68 17 January 1968

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19

B3 FRONT HEADQUARTERS AUTHORITY AND PAVN 1ST DIVISION HEADQUARTERS ELEMENT

DISCUSS ATTACK PLANS IN PLEIKU PROVINCE

On 17 January, MSA reported that a 16 January message from a B3 Front authority in the southern Kontum-Cambodia border area to a 1st Division headquarters element in the northeast Pleiku-Cambodia border area had detailed plans for an enemy campaign in Pleiku Province. According to the message, Duc Co and Le Thanh would be overrun initially. Later, Pleiku city and areas adjoining Route 19 would be "liberated".

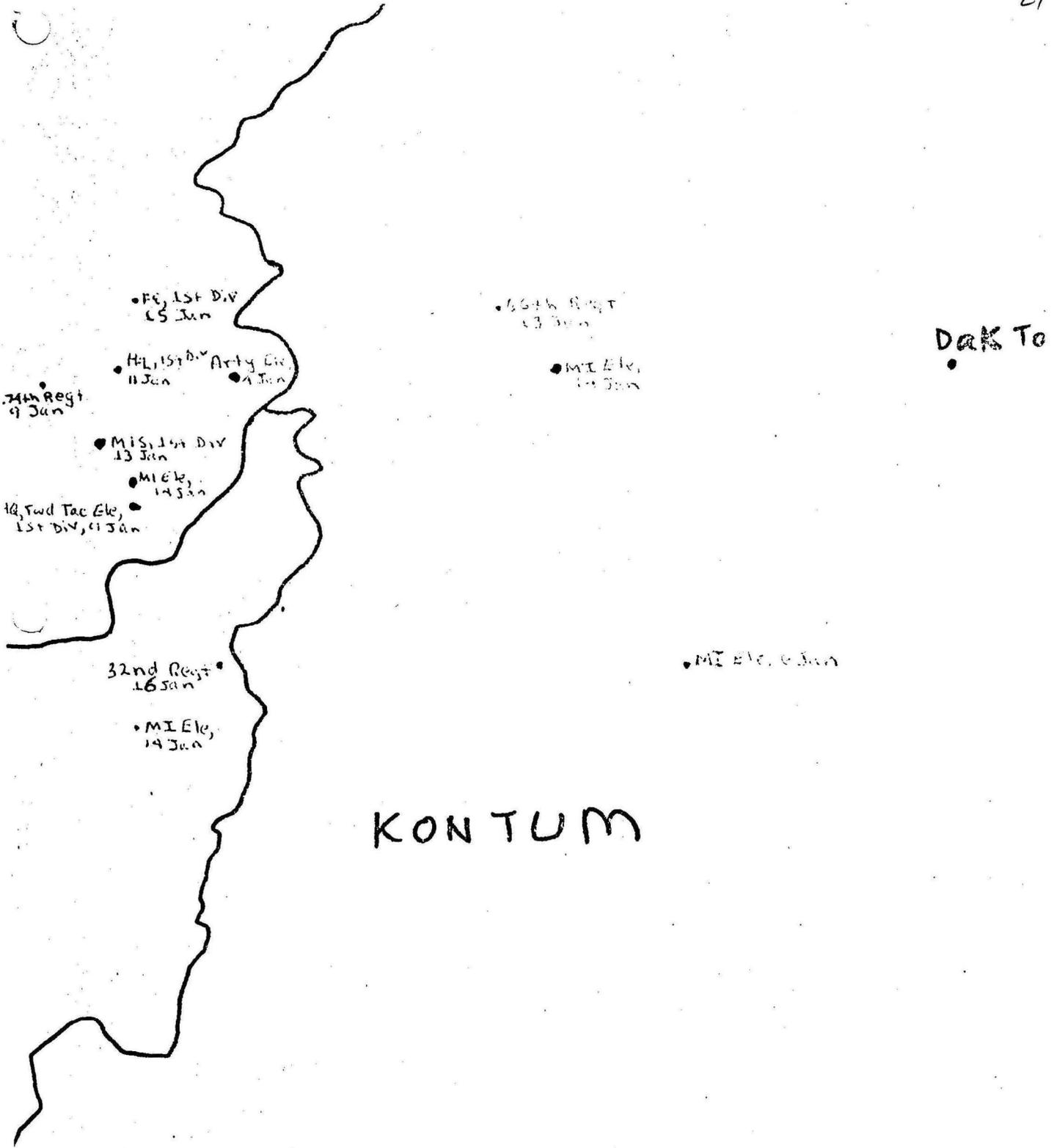
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2/0/VCH/R13-68 172014Z January 1968 PAVN 1ST DIVISION ELEMENT

RECEIVES PLANS FOR ATTACKS IN PLEIKU PROVINCE

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A later report on 17 January noted that unidentified B3 Front elements possibly operating in northeastern Pleiku province had discussed plans for a night artillery or mortar attack, scheduled to be conducted between 17 and 19 January. One message passed 16 January stated that "a 15 watt radio and a squad and a half" were to proceed to a previously desig-



CONCENTRATION OF B3 FRONT ELEMENTS IN TRI-BORDER AREA, MID-JANUARY, 1968

• Kentum

KONTUM

• B3 FRONT ASSEMBLY, 1530N

PLEIKU

• B3 FRONT ASSEMBLY, 1530N

• B3 FRONT ASSEMBLY, 1530N  
• B3 FRONT ASSEMBLY, 1530N  
• B3 FRONT ASSEMBLY, 1530N  
• B3 FRONT ASSEMBLY, 1530N  
• B3 FRONT ASSEMBLY, 1530N

• Pleiku

CONCENTRATION OF B3 FRONT ELEMENTS  
ON PLEIKU-KONTUM PROVINCE BORDER, MID-JANUARY, 1968

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nated area "in order to observe the city". A later message contained a fire control brevity code, apparently to be used in the attack. The originator of these two messages, although unlocated, was believed to be associated with one of the unidentified terminals clustered in the Non-tum-Pleiku province border areas of mid-January. This concentration now included, the report continued, an element of Hq, B3 Front, Pleiku Province; the possible Hq, B3 Front Forward element One; an element of the possible Forward Tactical Element, ARVN 1st Division; the probable Gia Lai (ARVN Pleiku) provincial Unit; and five elements associated with the B3 front.

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2/O/VCM/114-68 172144Z January 1968 UNIDENTIFIED ELEMENTS OF B3 FRONT DISCUSS ATTACK PLANS FOR 17 TO 19 JANUARY 1968

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Enemy elements continued to pass plans for attacks in Pleiku Province during the next several days. On 19 January, B3 reported that the B3 Front authority and the 1st Division headquarters element which had discussed plans for a campaign in Pleiku Province on 16 January were now passing additional messages relating to forthcoming attacks in Pleiku Province. The 1st Division headquarters element informed the B3 Front authority of a successful move by a probable 1st Division element between

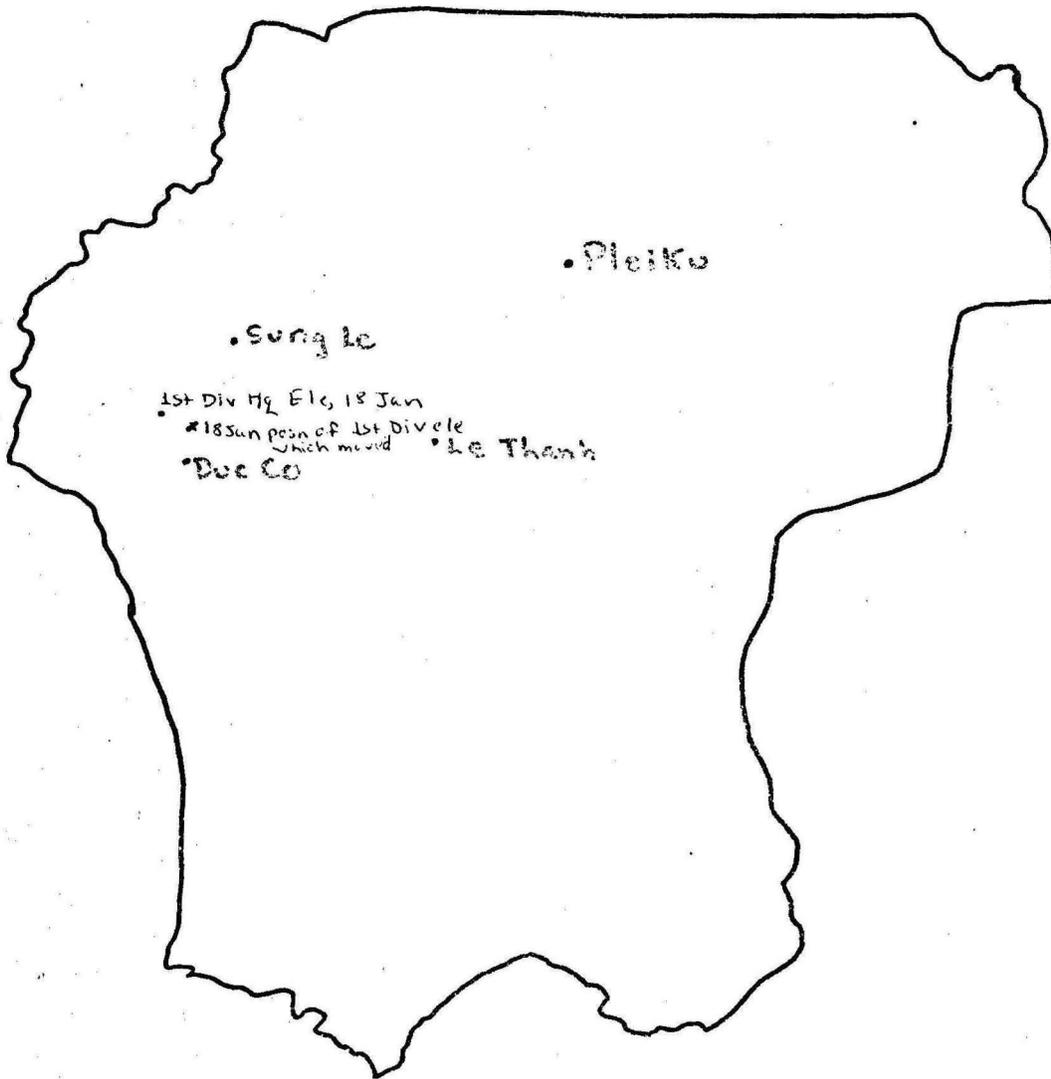
24

16 and 18 January. In another message, the 1st Division element discussed

Allied aircraft and artillery activity in the Le Thanh and Jung Le area.

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2/O/VCM/A25-68 192148Z January 1968 RELAYED MESSAGE 1 TO 2/O/VCM/113-68



1ST DIVISION HEADQUARTERS ELEMENT  
 REPORTS ON ALLIED ACTIVITY AND ENEMY  
 MOVEMENTS, 18 JANUARY 1968 (SEE 210/100/125-  
 68)

~~UNCLASSIFIED~~

Enemy interest in the Duc Co-Le Thanh area continued to intensify.

The 21 January SEAS reviewed several messages originated by the 1st Division headquarters element in the Duc Co area which indicated combat ready status for the forces under that elements control. The element referenced the marking of routes for the three infantry battalions, and for headquarters and its subordinate units, and provided further information on ARlied activity in the Sung Le area.

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3/0/STY/1.18-68 21 January 1968

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ENEMY ELEMENTS AND JUVENILE FORCES AND BATTALIONS

While enemy interest in western Pleiku Province was increasing, PAVN 1st Division elements continued to gather in Kontum. The 21 January SEAS noted that intensive surveillance of the Dak To area continued. The 22 January SEAS noted that three additional B3 Front-associated radio terminals had joined the concentration in the tri-border area. In addition, the PAVN 25th Regiment had relocated from northern Kontum Province, where it had operated until at least 8 January, and was now in southeastern Kontum Province, approximately 25 kilometers from Kontum city, and nearly 50 kilometers from its previous area of operations.

The 22 January SEAS warned of yet another concentration of B3 Front elements, in northeastern Darlac, near the Phu Bon Province border. This concentration involved B3 Front elements, and also elements associated with the PAVN 5th Division, suggesting a coordination of activities in by elements of these two formations.

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3/0/STY/120-68 22 January 1968

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TACTICAL ACTIVITY IN HIGHLANDS IMMINENT, 24 JANUARY 1968

On 24 January, NSA reported that a message passed by the B3 Front authority to the 1st Division headquarters element in the Duc Co area had strongly indicated that an enemy offensive in the western highlands was imminent. The message, passed 24 January, reviewed enemy tactical successes in the Dak To and Pleiku areas, and closed by stating:

"All of you must prepare urgently and thoroughly and maintain secrecy so that when N-Day comes we can open fire en masse. Aggressively prepare P4 and P8."

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2/0/VCM/128-68 241826Z January 1968 PAVN B3 FRONT AUTHORITY

INDICATES IMMINENT VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE IN WESTERN HIGHLANDS OF ML 5

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References to "N-Day" were appearing in other areas of MR 5 as well.

The term was used in a message from Group 44, a new division-level formation in the Quang Nam-Quang Tin area to several subscribers, including Hq, PAVN 2nd Division; the 402nd Sapper Battalion; and elements of the 368B and 68th PAVN Artillery Regiments.

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2/0/VCH/129-68 24 January 1968 Follow-up Nr 1 to  
2/0/VCH/127-68 241714Z, POSSIBLE IMMINENT VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST  
OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN COASTAL PROVINCES OF MILITARY REGION 5

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SEAS for 24 January warned that attacks in the Le Thanh-Duc Co area might occur on 24 or 25 January, based on messages exchanged between the B3 Front authority and the 1st Division headquarters element near Duc Co, which indicated that enemy preparations were nearing completion.

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3/0/STY/122-68 24 January 1968

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Thus, by 24 January, SIGINT had reflected a considerable volume of evidence indicating that enemy attacks in the western highlands were imminent. A concentration of enemy elements, including the 32nd, 66th and 174th Regiments had developed in the tri-border area, and intensive intelligence collection in the Dak To area continued unabated. A similar con-

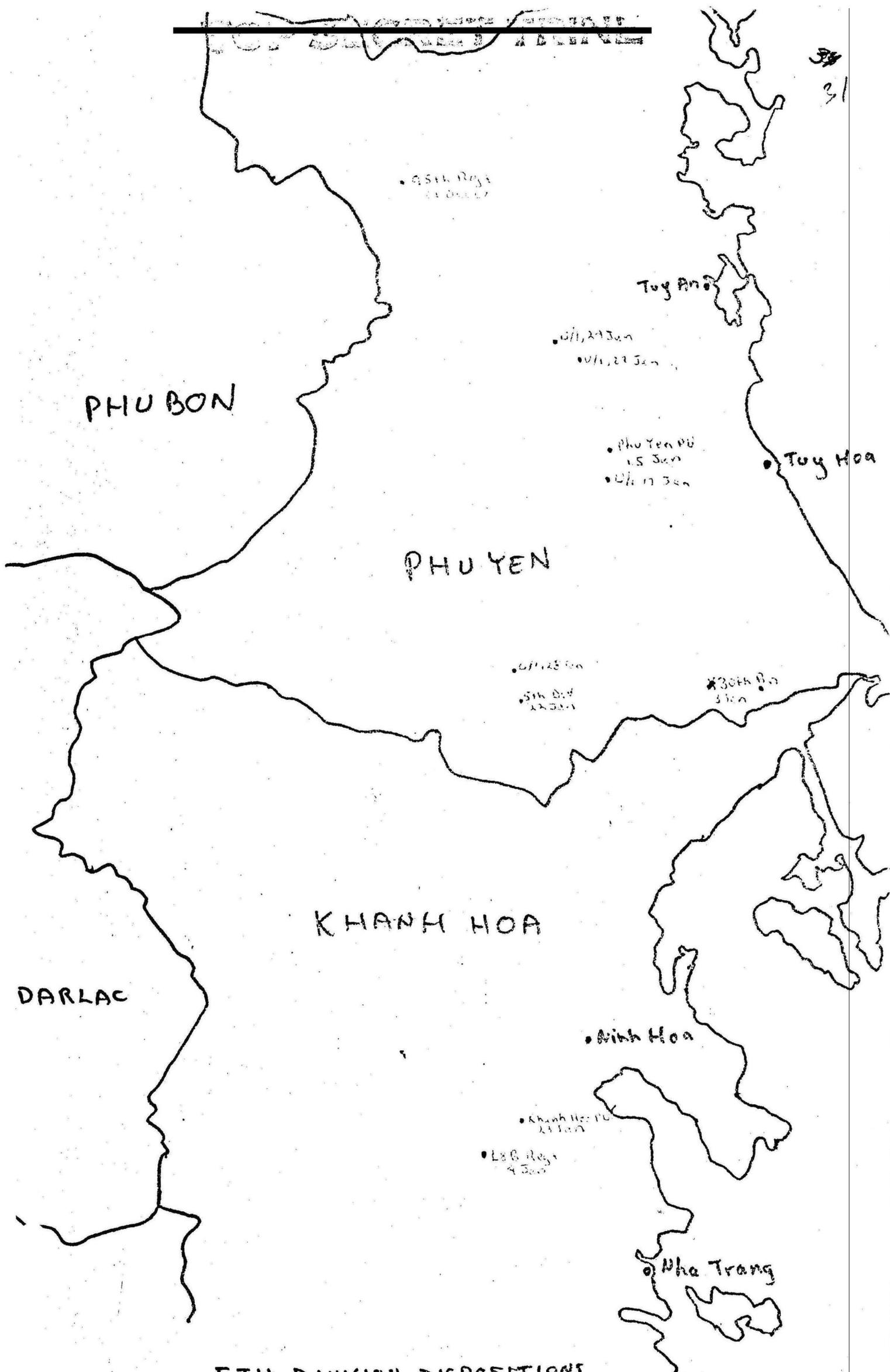
centration had developed in the Pleiku-Kontum Province border area, and enemy elements in that area discussed plans for attacks in western Pleiku in considerable detail. Messages exchanged between the B3 Front authority in the southern Kontum-Cambodia area and the 1st Division headquarters element near Duc Co had indicated that preparations for the enemy campaign in the area were in their final stages. Finally, a third concentration of B3 Front elements was building in northeast Darlac Province.

b. PAVN 3RD DIVISION AND SOUTHERN FRONT/PAVN 5TH DIVISIONS

In contrast to the wealth of information suggesting forthcoming enemy action in the B3 Front area, communications serving the PAVN 3rd Division in Binh Dinh Province and the Southern Front/PAVN 5th Division in Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa Provinces provided little to suggest impending enemy



3RD DIVISION DISPOSITIONS, JANUARY, 1968



5TH DIVISION DISPOSITIONS

action in their areas. With the exception of ARDF results, little SIGINT information was derived on either division. Communications serving the PAVN 3rd Division operated sporadically, as the division sought to evade large Allied units on PERSHING I and PERSHING II. However, 3rd Division elements were involved in several major tactical engagements during the period. Between 29 December and 4 January, 1st Cavalry Division elements killed more than 200 enemy troops from the 2nd VC and 18th PAVN Regiments. On 8 January the 8th Battalion, 18th Regiment raided a police installation in Qui Khon, and on 10 January, the 93rd Battalion, 2nd VC Regiment, supported by an artillery company drawn from the 3rd Division, attacked a battalion of the ARVN 41st Regiment. On 23 and 24 January, a few days before the Tet Offensive was launched, 3rd Division elements were brought to battle in two areas. The 95th Battalion, 2nd VC Regiment lost 128 killed near Phu My on 23 January, and retreated toward the Binh Dinh coast. On 23 and 24 January the 9th Battalion, 18th Regiment was engaged near Phu Cat by South Korean forces, and lost 240 men during the two day battle.

Further south, in Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa Provinces, the PAVN 5th Division was inactive. Combat elements of the 5th Division remained in sanctuaries and evaded Allied forces. No major engagements developed in this area, and little SIGINT information was provided.

c. PAVN 2ND DIVISION

ENEMY ELEMENTS IN 2ND DIVISION AREA TACTICALLY ACTIVE, 2-3 JANUARY

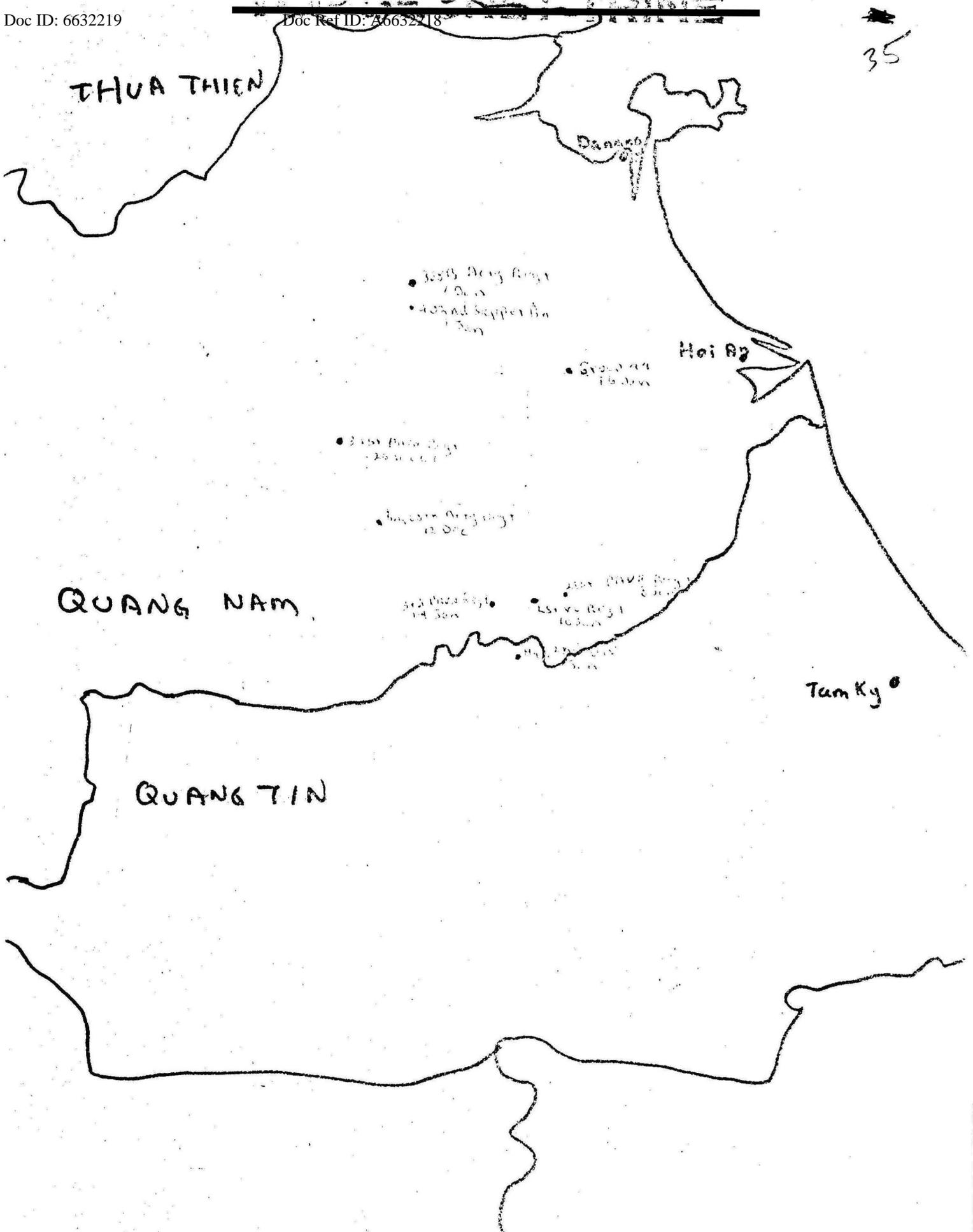
In early January, enemy forces in the Quang Nam-Quang Tin-Quang Ngai Province area staged several attacks. On 2 January, the 406th Sapper Battalion and local force elements attacked Nghia Hanh Subsector in Quang Ngai Province. The ARVN defenders lost 18 killed and 52 wounded. Enemy losses were set at 72 killed. On 3 January, the PAVN 368B Artillery Regiment conducted a rocket attack against Danang, as other enemy elements conducted small scale attacks southwest of Danang as a diversion. That same day, 2nd Division elements attacked several landing zones in the Que Son area. The PAVN 68th Artillery Regiment supported these assaults with 122 millimeter rocket fire. The 2nd Division lost 400 killed in these attacks.

Following this brief upsurge in tactical activity, 2nd Division elements attempted to evade Allied forces on WHEELER/WALLOWA, which continued

to exact a heavy toll of enemy elements in the Que Son area. 2nd Division communications bore frequent references to bombardment or difficult situations. Communications activity was generally sporadic, and reflective of a continuing alert status due to Allied harassment.

PAVN 2ND DIVISION ELEMENTS RELOCATE

In mid-January, several 2nd Division elements gave evidence of intent to move, and the 17 January SEAS noted that a major redeployment of 2nd Division elements was possibly under way. During the next few days, that suspicion was confirmed as major 2nd Division units repositioned toward



ENEMY DISPOSITIONS IN QUANG NAM-  
 QUANG TIN BORDER AREA, MID-JANUARY, 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

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the coast, By 23 January, ARDF information indicated that major combat elements of the 2nd Division had already undertaken substantial moves; The SEAS noted that the 2nd Division headquarters had moved north, into Quang Nam Province; the 1st VC Regiment had effected a similar move; and the PAVN 21st Regiment had moved south and then east, taking that unit toward the coast, and into an area southwest of Tam Ky in Quang Tin Province.

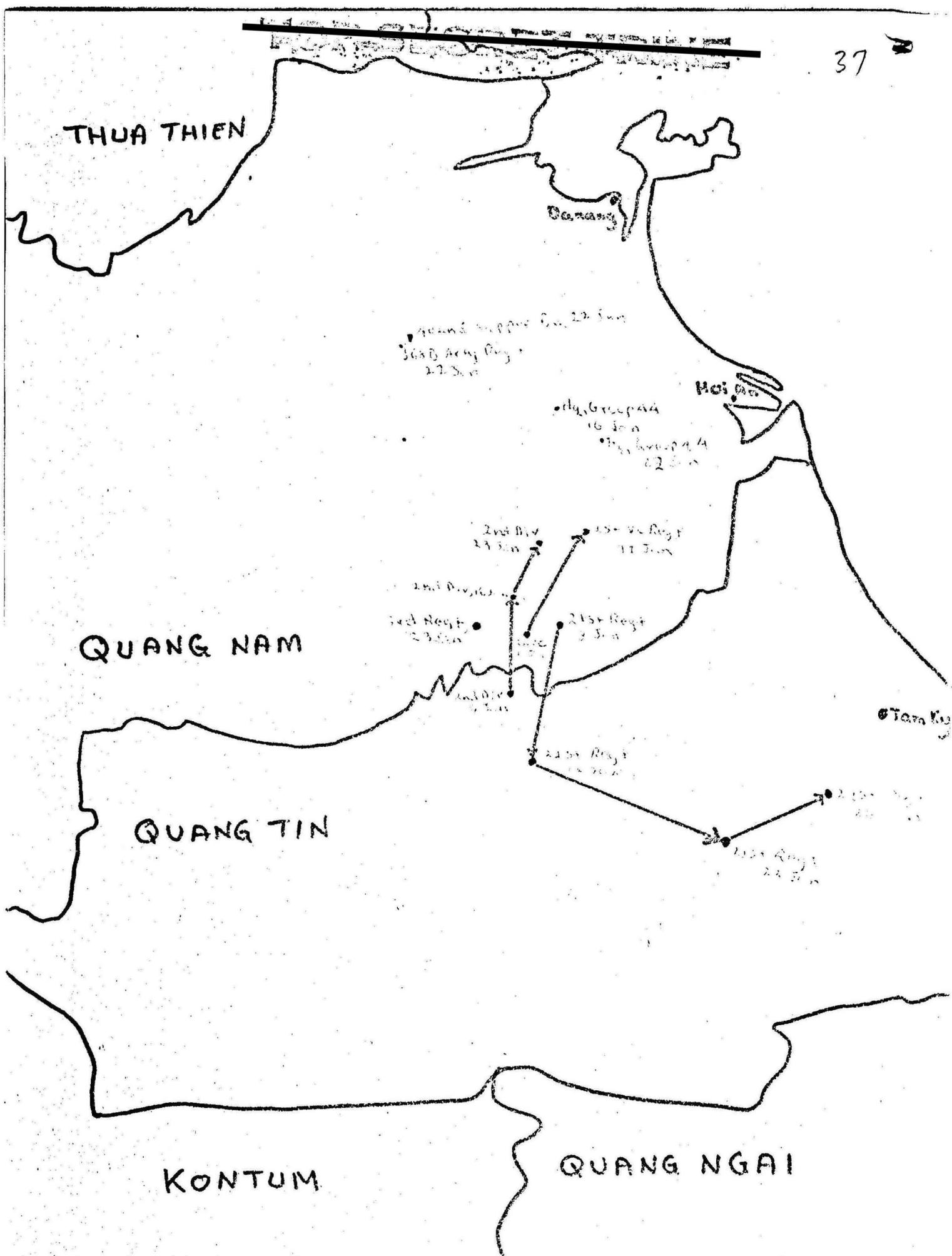
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3/0/STY/R15-68 17 January 1968; 3/0/STY/R20-68 23 January 1968

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GROUP 44 AND 402ND SAPPER BATTALION IDENTIFIED IN COMMUNICATIONS

In mid-January, SIGINT analysts achieved significant progress in recovering the enemy communications structure in the area by the identification of Group 44 and the 402nd Sapper Battalion in radio communications. The unidentified Rear Services Headquarters in Quang Nam Province was identified as Rear Services Headquarters, Group 44 through captured documents. During the latter half of 1967, this formation was emerging as a major headquarters, following its initial observance in communications in June. The 402nd Sapper Battalion was also identified in communications <sup>reported on</sup> in the 19 January SEAS. This unit communicated with Hq, Group 44 and PH 5 Provincial Unit Control, among others.



2ND DIVISION ELEMENTS RE POSITION, JANUARY, 1968

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3/0/STY/R17-68 19 January 1968

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ENEMY OPERATIONS THROUGHOUT COASTAL PROVINCES OF MR5 REPORTEDLY IMMINENT

On 24 January NSA issued a report warning that Communist offensive operations in the coastal provinces of MR 5 was possibly imminent. This conclusion was based on a message sent to the PAVN 21st Regiment by Hq, MR 5 Main Force Unit Control (MFUC) on 23 January. The message, signed by the Chief Signal Officer of Hq, MR 5 was addressed to the "signal chiefs ((of)) all units", indicating, the report noted, that it was probably intended for all elements controlled by Hq, MR 5 MFUC, including those in Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa Provinces. The message stated that "the situation is very tense", and ordered the recipients to follow stipulated communications procedures, and "call the watch regularly in order to receive orders and report". The originator then revealed that he had designated the "signal 303 as "have opened fire" ".

The report then reviewed the attack posture of 2nd Division elements, and noted that PAVN 3rd Division elements were repositioning in Binh Dinh. In conclusion, the report noted that:

"Recent information also suggests that Hq, MR 5 MFUC has activated forward tactical elements in the PAVN 2nd and 3rd Division areas of operations. Activation of Hq, MR 5 forward tactical elements have, in the past, preceded Vietnamese Communist offensive operations."

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2/0/VCM/127-68 241714Z January 1968, POSSIBLE IMMINENT VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IN COASTAL PROVINCES OF MILITARY REGION 5

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A follow-up report, issued later that day, indicated that Group 44 subordinates would also be involved in scheduled offensive operations:

"Another unit in MR 5 was associated with impending Communist offensives in coastal areas of the region when the Hq, Rear Services Group 44 provided instructions to the suspected PAVN 368B Artillery Regiment to employ certain practices in passing "N-Day" messages. ...

Another relevant message was passed from Hq, Rear Services Group 44 on this date possibly to all subscribers-- including Hq, PAVN 2nd Division; the suspected 368B Artillery Regiment; the suspected Forward Element of the 368B Artillery Regiment; the probable Hq, 402nd Sapper Battalion; the suspected 1st or 3rd Battalion of the 68th Artillery Regiment; the Quang Da and Quang Nam Provincial Units; the suspected Lanang Municipal Unit; and other unidentified entities in the Quang Nam-Quang Binh area. The message stated in part: "The main N-Day ... was received and passed to B1 in message number 17". N-Day is the Vietnamese equivalent for D-Day. ...

Recent communications of the probable Hq, PAVN B3 Front authority and a probable PAVN 1st Division element in western Pleiku Province have also included referenced to "N-Day"; in addition they have contained references to the initiation of hostilities in the near future. Other unidentified B3 Front units believed to be located in northeastern Pleiku Province have referred to impending hostilities."

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2/0/VCM/129-68 242159Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NUMBER 1 TO 2/0/VCM/127-68

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Thus, by 24 January, SIGINT had developed a considerable volume of

evidence suggesting major enemy offensive activity in the western high-lands and coastal provinces of MR 5. Frequent references to "N-Day" in both areas indicated that the offensives in each were coordinated.

3. MILITARY REGION TRI-THIEN-HUE

The first indications of impending offensive activity by enemy forces in the MR TTH area were provided by evidence that the Forward Element, Hq, MR TTH was acquiring the status of a major headquarters. The 3 January SEAS noted that a communications facility active since August 1967 had been identified as serving Forward Element, Hq, MR TTH. Communications subordinates of this formation included the PAVN 6th and 9th Regiments, and five unidentified elements, all of which also communicated with Hq, MR TTH.

The 21 January SEAS revealed that the Forward Element, Hq, MR TTH had relocated during late December from the Quang Tri-Thua Thien Province border area to a position just ten kilometers from Hue. This formation now communicated with between eight and ten subordinates, including, as noted earlier, the PAVN 6th and 9th Regiments, and also the PAVN 4th Regiment, identified in communications by NSA on 17 January.

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3/0/STY/RO3-68 3 Jan; 3/0/STY/R18-68 21 Jan; 2/0/VCM/R16-68 17 Jan 68,

\* HEADQUARTERS, PAVN 4TH REGIMENT TENTATIVELY IDENTIFIED

On 23 January the daily SHAS warned of renewed enemy interest in Hue, 4/1

as indicated by the current disposition of Communist units in MR TTH.

Hq, MR TTH had moved 10 kilometers closer to Hue by 20 January. Communications activity of Hq, MR TTH was low during the period 21-22 January; conversely, the Forward Element was extremely active in communications on those two days, suggesting a further move by Hq, MR TTH. The Forward Element and PAVN 6th Regiment elements remained in the Hue area.

\* \* \* \* \*

3/0/STY/R20-68 23 January 1968

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Tactical activity was light in MR TTH during January. On 7 January, the 802nd Battalion led other enemy elements in an attack on Phu Loc, which was defended by a company of the 1/5th Regiment, USMC, and several USMC/Popular Force Combined Action Platoons. Allied casualties were 47 KIA 124 WIA and several buildings and installations. Enemy losses were 91 killed. On 16 January, Phu Loc District Headquarters was attacked by elements of the PAVN 4th Regiment and 804B Battalion.

#### 4. ARVN III CTZ

The most significant developments in the ARVN III CTZ prior to 25 January were a steady increase in intelligence collection by MI elements of

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the VC 5th and 9th Divisions, and the emergence of several new communications controls as major authorities. Intelligence reporting by both 5th and 9th Division MI elements began on 6 January, with 5th Division MI elements reporting extensively on southern Bien Hoa Province, and 9th Division elements concentrating on northeastern Tay Ninh.

INTELLIGENCE REPORTING BY 9TH DIVISION MI ELEMENTS

The 8 January SEAS noted that the probable Hq, C95 Reconnaissance Company had resumed communications activity with one subordinate, which had commenced intelligence collection activities on 6 January. The C95 Reconnaissance Company, subordinate to the Military Intelligence Section (MIS), 9th Division, had not been observed in communications since 12 December. During late November and early December, this unit had collected intelligence in support of 9th Division operations in the Bu Dop-Bo Duc campaign.

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3/0/STY/R07-68 8 January 1968

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Intelligence collection by 9th Division MI elements continued during January. The 18 January SEAS reviewed several enemy MI messages translated by USM-626 which indicated extreme interest in northern Tay Ninh. In one message, the 46th Sapper-Reconnaissance Battalion informed COSVN

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about a clash at Ba Chiem. COSVN noted in another message that there were two US battalions at Ba Chiem, the 4th Battalion, 9th Regiment and the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Regiment. In addition, COSVN noted, the 3rd Battalion, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Regiment were at Soc Con Trang. The 4/9th and the 2/22nd and 3/22nd Regiments are all 25th Division elements. The 18 January SEAS also revealed that a subordinate MI element had informed its parent headquarters, the C95 Reconnaissance Company that the "enemy" was near Soc Con Trang.

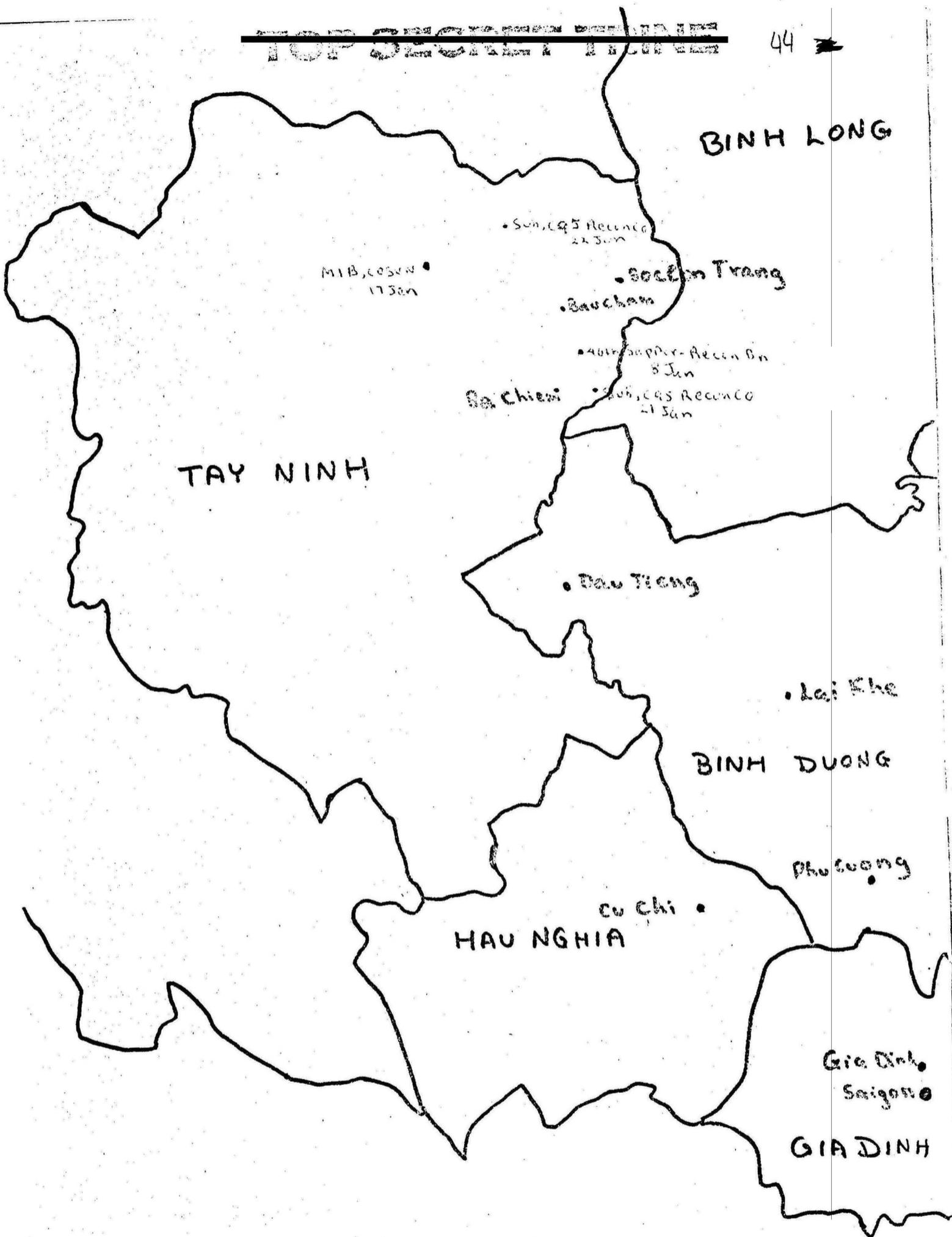
The 19 January SEAS noted continued enemy interest in this area. The C95 Reconnaissance Company subordinate informed its headquarters about Allied activity in the Bau Cham and Ba Chiem, and referenced a Communist "artillery group" and possibly a heavy weapons unit. The SEAS reminded its readers that the 46th Sapper-Reconnaissance Battalion had also reported on this area.

#### 5TH DIVISION MI ELEMENTS RESUME REPORTING, JANUARY 1968

On 23 January, the SEAS disclosed that communications serving MI elements subordinate to the VC 5th Division had resumed on 29 December. Intelligence reporting by 5th Division elements began on 6 January, concurrent with the resumption of intelligence reporting by VC 9th Division

~~TOP SECRET~~

44



MI ELEMENTS REPORT ON ALLIED  
 ACTIVITY IN NORTHEASTERN TAY NINH,  
 MID-JANUARY, 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

MI elements. 5th Division MI communications had been virtually inactive since 12 September 1967, reflecting a lull of several months in 5th Division offensive operations.

The SEAS noted that in an 8 January message, the MIS, 5th Division had ordered a subordinate to report daily on rice, transportation and manpower. A 10 January message ordered the subordinate to maintain close contact with the 275th Regiment, and to guide the 274th Regiment to a predetermined location.

On 24 January the SEAS noted continued intensive intelligence collection efforts by VC 5th Division MI subordinates in southern Bien Hoa. 5th Division combat elements were active on 24 and 25 January, as both the 274th and 275th Regiments attacked Popular Forces camps and other installations.

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3/0/STY/R20-68 23 Jan 68; 3/0/STY/R21-68 24 Jan 68

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ACTIVITY OF MAJOR COMMUNICATIONS CONTROLS IN III CTZ, JANUARY, 1968

In January, SIGINT analysts became aware of the growing importance of several communications groups which had been activated in October 1967.

One of these new groups served a new front headquarters in Binh Long

Province. Two others were in Tay Ninh Province, and there were one each in

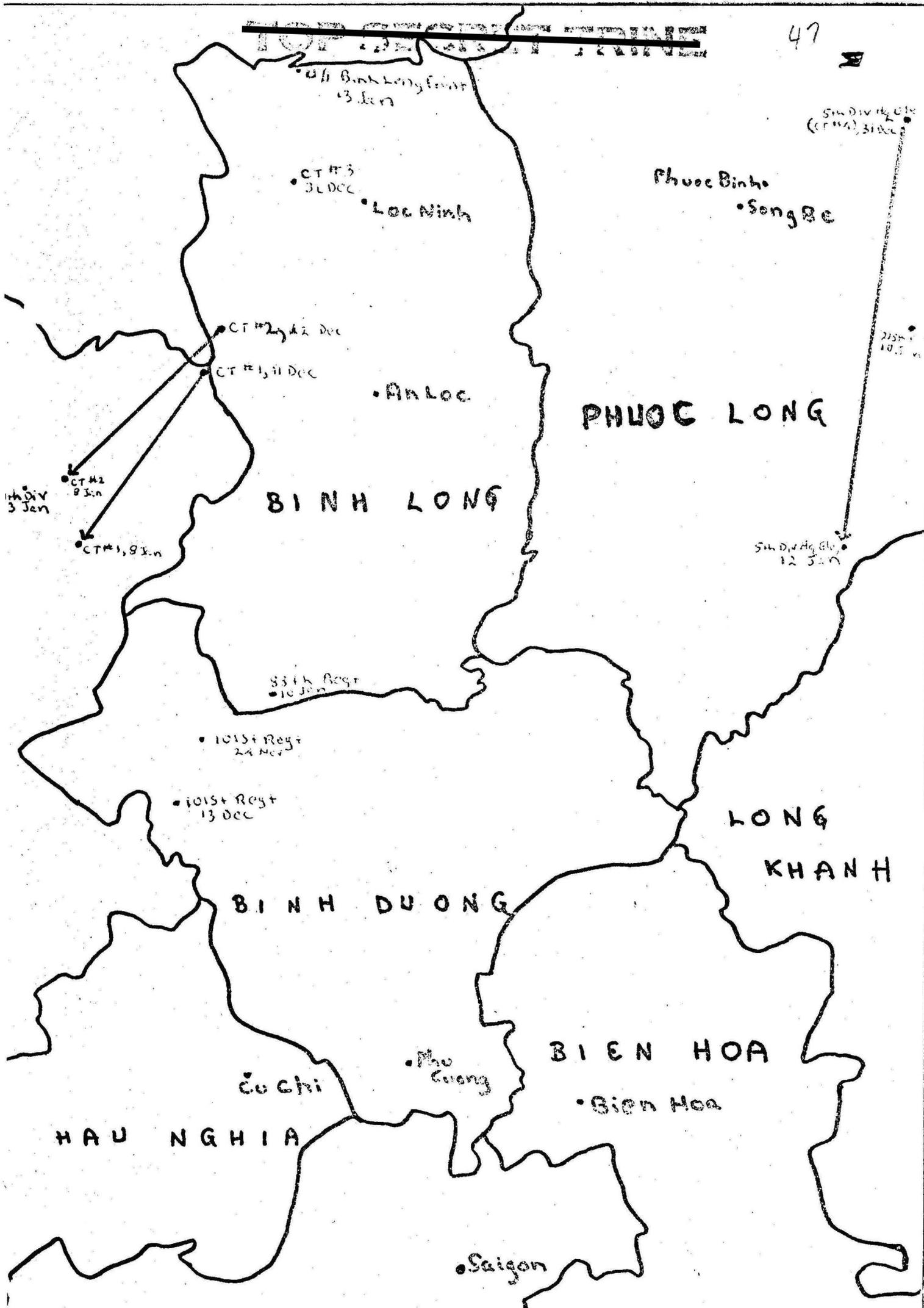
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Phuoc Long and Binh Long Provinces. Although scattered information on these new groups was presented in the daily SEAS between 10 and 15 January, an NSA report issued 15 January summarized the development and current status of four of these headquarters:

The first of these controls, located in northeastern Tay Ninh Province, had been active in communications with three unidentified subordinates since 3 October 1967. SIGINT evidence strongly indicated that these three subordinates were the PAVN 7th Division; the Forward Element, 7th Division; and the PAVN 101st Regiment, 7th Division.

The second new control, located in close proximity to the first, was a watch control, active since 20 October 1967. This control numbered among its subscribers the PAVN 7th Division and its Forward Element; the VC 272nd Regiment, 9th Division; and other elements. Two of these other subscribers were also subscribers to the watch groups controlled by the VC 9th Division and the Military Affairs Section, COSVN (MAS COSVN). In mid-December, the first and second controls were located within five kilometers of each other; by 8 January, each had relocated to a position well inside Tay Ninh Province, and were still located within a few kilometers of each other.

The third major control, also first observed on 20 October 1967, was located in Binh Long Province, west-northwest of Loc Ninh. This station



DISPOSITION OF CONTROLS AND SUBORDINATES DISCUSSED IN 15 JANUARY REPORT (2/0/VCN/RLD-68)

communicated with three subordinates, including two which also communicated with the first control. These two subordinates were believed to be the PAVN 7th Division's Forward Element and 101st Regiment. The third major subordinate was believed to be the PAVN 141st Regiment, 7th Division.

The fourth new control was located in Phuoc Long Province, and had also been activated on 20 October. This station was believed to serve a headquarters element of the VC 5th Division. Its two subordinates were believed to be the VC 275th Regiment and the PAVN 88th Regiment.

Thus, of the four new controls, one served a detached element of Hq, VC 5th Division; one group, a watch control, probably represented the headquarters of a formation of higher than division echelon, inasmuch as its subscribers included regimental subordinates of both the PAVN 7th and VC 9th Divisions; and the remaining two controls were closely associated with the PAVN 7th Division. One of these two controls apparently communicated with the Forward Element, PAVN 7th Division and two of its regimental subordinates, the PAVN 101st and 141st Regiments. It is interesting to note that the 5 January SENS reported that the Forward Element, PAVN 7th Division had not communicated with the PAVN 141st or 101st Regiment since 30 October and 6 December 1967, respectively. The Forward Element communicated regularly only with the PAVN 165th Regiment, 7th Divi-

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sion, the only regimental subordinate of the division which was not a subscriber to the group controlled by the third major new control.

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3/0/STY/R05-68 5 Jan 68; 2/0/VCM/R10-68 15 January 1968 SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATIONS POSSIBLY ASSOCIATED WITH VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST MAIN FORCE UNITS IN MILITARY REGIONS 1 AND 10.

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The 19 January SEAS noted that the unidentified front headquarters in Binh Long Province was assuming a larger role, as evidenced by attempts by Hq, B3 Front, Hq, MR 2 and Hq, MR 6 to contact the front.

The 22 January SEAS noted that the front had activated its own watch communications group. One subscriber to this new watch group was Hq, B3 Front.

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3/0/STY/R17-68 19 Jan 68; 3/0/STY/R19-68 22 Jan 68

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INDICATIONS OF A GROWING COMMUNICATIONS ALERT STATUS, 23 - 25 JANUARY

Between 23 and 25 January, there were several significant developments indicative of a possible alert status for several communications entities within III CTZ. The 23 January SEAS noted that the 271st Regiment, 9th Division, which had last communicated with its parent headquarters, on 19 November, had attempted to call Hq, 9th Division on 20 and

22 January. The 24 January SEAS revealed that MAS COSVN had sent urgent, high priority messages to HQ, MR 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 10. The 25 January SEAS revealed that similar messages had been sent to HQ, B3 Front, and concluded that this activity was possibly related to impending enemy action. The 25 January SEAS also noted that on 23 January, the Binh Long Front had attempted to contact the VC 5th and 9th Divisions, after being inactive in communications with these two commands since 20 November and 26 September, respectively.

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3/0/STY/R20-68 23 Jan 68; 3/0/STY/R21-68 24 Jan 68; 3/0/STY/R22-68 25 Jan 68

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Thus, by 24 January, a growing list of traditional indications of impending hostile activity had already been observed. Military Intelligence elements were collecting information in several areas. MI elements serving the PAVN 1st Division were active near Dak To and Pleiku, in the western highlands. Further south, 5th Division MI elements were developing information in southern Phuoc Long ~~Phuoc Hoa~~, and COSVN and 9th Division MI elements concentrated on northeastern Tay Ninh Province.

The volume of tactical messages was steadily increasing, particularly in MR 5, where there were frequent references to "M-Day". Specific enemy targets were discussed in attack plans in Pleiku Province.

Major enemy units were repositioning throughout South Vietnam, and concentrations of enemy stations were developing in many areas, including the Kontum-Cambodia-Laos tri-border area; the Kontum-Pleiku Province border area; northeastern Darlac Province; southern Quang Nam; the Hue area; and others.

Communications behavior pointed to an increasingly evident communications alert status in many areas. Typical of this behavior was the increasing number of forward elements activated by key enemy administrative and combat formations. In some areas, notably III CTZ, there was a significant expansion of the communications structure. Urgent messages were passed by both COSVN and Hq, MR 5 to a large number of subordinates.

All of the indicators summarized above had proven to be extremely valid portents of major tactical action by the enemy. The observance of a wide variety of these indicators throughout South Vietnam strongly suggested that large scale attacks were planned in many areas. By 25 January, this accumulation of SIGINT evidence convinced NSA and field analysts that a widespread, coordinated Communist offensive was planned for the immediate future. Accordingly, NSA summarized this evidence for SIGINT consumers in a report issued 25 January.

### 1. THE 25 JANUARY REPORT

The 25 January report reviewed communications developments during *the previous days* recent weeks, and concluded that a coordinated enemy offensive was imminent:

"During the past week, SIGINT has provided evidence of a coordinated attack to occur in the near future in several areas of South Vietnam. While the bulk of SIGINT evidence indicates the most critical areas to be in the northern half of the country, there is additional evidence that Communist units in Nam Bo may also be involved. The major target areas of enemy offensive operations include the western highlands, the coastal provinces of Mt 5, and the Khe Sanh and Hue areas. ..."

The report then summarized the available evidence, area by area. As evidence that an attack in the western highlands of Kontum and Pleiku Provinces was imminent, it cited the substantial volume of tactical messages passed between a B3 Front authority and a 1st Division headquarters element since 16 January. These messages detailed enemy battle plans in Pleiku Province, and referenced "N-Day". Further evidence of enemy intentions in the highlands was furnished by the development of two concentrations of enemy troops, one in Pleiku and the other in southwest Kontum.

Turning to the coastal provinces of Mt 5, the report noted that:

"SIGINT indicates that elements of the PAVN 2nd Division and Hq, Mt 5 currently located in the Quang Nam-Quang Tin Province border area are in an attack posture. The possible 2nd Division Forward Element has been maintaining tactical control over the division's three regiments since 31 December, a procedure indicative in the past of Vietnamese Communist offensives. Additionally, the PAVN 21st Regiment, PAVN 2nd Division

was located on 22 January, 9 km southwest of Tam Ky city. "Col- lateral information indicates that an attack by elements of the 21st Regiment is imminent in the area. 53

In Binh Dinh Province, communications activity indicates that the PAVN 3rd Division may be repositioning. Finally, recent information suggests that Hq, III 5 Main Force Unit Control has activated forward tactical elements in the areas of the 2nd and 3rd Divisions. Activation of such elements has, in the past, preceded offensive operations. ..."

The report also referenced messages passed by Group 44, which mentioned "N-Day". As noted earlier, "N-Day" messages were prominent in B3 Front communications as well.

The report then noted the deployment of the PAVN 812th Regiment to a position well south of Route 9, on the Quang Tri-Thua Thien Province border, and reviewed the buildup of enemy forces near Hue.

Next, the report considered evidence of impending enemy activity in the III CTZ. Although references to a coordinated battle plan were not observed, in contrast to frequent references to such a plan in MH 5 communications, the sum total of recent activity in III CTZ strongly indicated that the enemy offensive would involve Communist units in several areas of III CTZ. The report noted that in the Tay Ninh-Binh Long Province area, recent activity was highlighted by the resumption of communications between Hq, VC 9th Division and its subordinate regiments on 19

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January, after a silence dating back to late November. MI elements serving the 9th Division had resumed intelligence reporting on 6 January, and had been gathering information on Allied installations in the Tay Ninh-Binh Long area. In addition, the VC 46th Sapper-Reconnaissance Battalion had been providing its superior, MIB, COSVN with information on the same area.

In southern Phuoc Long Province, 5th Division MI elements had resumed communications activity on 29 December, after more than three months of virtual silence. Intelligence collection by 5th Division MI elements commenced on 6 January. In addition, a 5th Division headquarters element had emerged in the Phuoc Long-Long Khanh Province area in January, and was apparently exercising control over the VC 275th and PAVN 88th Regiments.

In the Bien Hoa-Long Khanh Province area, elements of MIB, MA 1 indicated possible enemy activity against Allied installations. One message referenced the cover designator of the 1st Battalion, VC 274th Regiment.

Finally, the report cited the expanding role of the BinhLong Front, and unusual message activity between COSVN and Hq, MR 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10 and B3 Front.

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2/0/VCH/R32-68 25 January 1968

COORDINATED VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE EVIDENCED IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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During the remaining few days preceding the opening of the Tet Offensive, SIGINT evidence continued to provide evidence of a widespread enemy drive. The remainder of this section will review these SIGINT indications of the impending attacks, area by area, concluding with the information presented on 29 January, immediately prior to the launching of Tet attacks in the ARVN II CTZ.

2. MILITARY REGION 5, 25-29 JANUARY

a. PAVN B3 FRONT (WESTERN HIGHLANDS)

The 26 January S&S noted that the B3 Front headquarters authority in southwestern Kontum and the PAVN 1st Division headquarters element in the Pleiku-Cambodia border area were continuing to discuss preparations for enemy offensive operations in the area. In addition, 1st Division MI elements continued their intelligence collection activities near Dak To.

On 27 January, NSA issued the first follow-up to the 25 January message which had detailed indications of a coordinated enemy offensive.

This follow-up report cited messages exchanged between the B3 Front authority and the 1st Division element, stating that:

"Through at least 27 January, SIGINT has continued to provide evidence of an impending Vietnamese Communist offensive, particularly in the western highlands area. Two messages were passed by the probable Hq, B3 Front authority to a probable PAVN 1st Division element in western Pleiku Province reporting on the reinforcing of the 1st Division element and on the movement of that element to a new position. ..."

In addition, the report continued, an unidentified B3 Front element in northeastern Pleiku Province had referenced "K-Day" in a message, which also mentioned recoilless rifle and B-40 rocket fire in support of enemy attacks, and the preparation of firing positions. The report concluded that:

"While the locale of this particular attack is not specified, it would appear likely to be planned for areas of northeastern Pleiku Province, judging by the location of the element transmitting the message. That location, moreover, is not far from a concentration of B3 Front elements in the Pleiku-Kontum Province border area to the northeast of Pleiku city."

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2/0/VCM/R36-68 272009Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NUMBER ONE TO 2/0/VCM/R32-68

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On 28 January, NSA reported that the PAVN 1st Division element had indicated in a message to the B3 Front authority that it had crossed the river on 27 January, and was "making combat readiness preparations and are preparing dry provisions so that we can move the troops in on 28 January".

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2/0/VCM/R37-68 281615Z FOLLOW-UP NUMBER 2 TO 2/0/VCM/R32-68

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A report issued by NSA later that day indicated that the river crossed by the 1st Division element was apparently the Ton Le Son, which forms the border between Pleiku Province and Cambodia. That report also reviewed message activity between HHS, PAVN 1st Division and a subordinate MI ele-

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ment between 24 and 26 January. These messages indicated that a movement of enemy troops and artillery was underway. In a 24 January message, the subordinate informed MIS, 1st Division that it was undertaking a six day march. A 26 January message from this element referenced difficulties in effecting a river crossing.

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2/O/VCM/R38-68 281902Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 3 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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Still later on 28 January, NSA reported that a 28 January message passed by MIS 1st Division to the subordinate element had pinpointed the date for an attack as the night of 29-30 January. A message indicated that the attack is to commence "as soon as possible", but no later than 0030 hours (GOLF) on 30 January. The MIS identified the target as "B3", and noted that a friendly unit had arrived at "B6". The MI element was ordered to initiate communications with this unit immediately. The subordinate MI element was informed that the friendly units would enter "B3" (the target area) at 0200 hours (GOLF) on 30 January.

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2/O/VCM/R40-68 280038Z January 1968 FOLLOWUP NR 5 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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58

Apparently, the plan of attack was for the target area (B3) to be attacked with a preliminary barrage commencing 0030 hours on the night of 29-30 January. At 0200 hours, the ground assault was scheduled to commence. This was the first concrete indication that attacks would take place during Tet in the western highlands, and, as indicated, this warning was passed to consumers the day before the scheduled attacks. It is also worthy of note that the White House was included on distribution for this report and subsequent follow-up reports to the original message warning of a coordinated offensive.

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The 28 January SENS noted that the 1st Division element had reported to the B3 Front authority that Allied artillery and helicopters had been shelling and bombing in the vicinity of Chu Ba and Chu Ngöt, two Allied positions.

\* \* \* \* \*

3/0/STY/124-68 28 January 1968

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On 29 January, NSA reported that tactical messages exchanged between the B3 Front authority and the 1st Division headquarters element on 28 January had discussed attack plans in western Pleiku Province. The B3 Front authority had ordered: "Be resourceful at P4 and P8 and at Le Thanh regard-

✓

ding the two mission: ~~to~~ stay close to the enemy and strike the commandos who come out to search; and ~~to~~ aggressively fire at low-flying aircraft."

The 1st Division element reported to the B3 Front authority that Allied artillery fire in the Chu Ba area had been heavy the preceding night.

\*\*\*\*\*

2/O/VCM/R41-68 290532Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 6 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

\*\*\*\*\*

On 29 January, NSA also reported that all four subordinates of the MIS, PAVN 1st Division were now in the western Kontum Province-Cambodia border area. The report referenced recent messages which indicated close enemy surveillance of Tan Canh Airfield, near Dak To, and the road between Tan Canh and Kontum city, and concluded that:

"Thus, SIGINT continues to indicate at least two impending offensives in the western highlands area: the Pleiku Province and western Kontum area. Messages of 16 and 24 January passed from a PAVN B3 Front authority to a probable element of the Hq, PAVN 1st Division suggested a plan for a simultaneous attack in the Dak To area of Kontum Province, the Pleiku city and western Pleiku Province area, and the Phu Bon-Darlac Province area."

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2/O/VCM/R42-68 292147Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 7 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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On 29 January, NSA reported that two 29 January messages from the B3 Front authority to the 1st Division Hq element had provided detailed

~~TOP SECRET TAME~~

60



PAVN 1ST DIVISION HQ ELEMENT RECEIVES INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTACKS IN WESTERN PLEIKU, 29 JANUARY 1968

~~TOP SECRET TAME~~

instructions for attacks in western Pleiku Province. One message, passed at 601  
 0035Z on 29 January, had ordered: "be careful and maintain vigilance. ...  
 when ... the attack is finished, move in gradually. If you stay close,  
 then you will not come under air and artillery attack. 2. Where is the  
 enemy .. at Chu Ba... Annihilate them element by element. Be sure to  
 reconnoiter in the direction of Chu Ba, and when they come out to search  
 the river and your crossing point. ..."

A later message, transmitted at 0820Z, 29 January, ordered: "

"1. You are to report the enemy situation in your areas: Chu Ngot, Chu Ba, and the river bank. 2. Having met to study your reports we estimate that there are no 105s at Chu Ba at all. It is possible that all they will do is bring 175s up to Sung Le and fire them. 3. If Chu Ba has 105s 100% for certain then it will be necessary to investigate one enemy battalion there and, therefore, you comrades will have to conduct reconnaissance, stay close, and slip approximately one squad into Chu Kram. Take precautions against their conducting a search as a decoy for a withdraw to Le Thanh. If the enemy is really at Chu Ba then stop and block and destroy them through numerous small and separate attacks. 4. If the enemy actually searches in large numbers then this is tremendous. Try in every way to bog them down. ..."

\* \* \* \* \*

2/0/VCM/143-68 292320Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NO. 8 TO 2/0/VCM/132-68

\* \* \* \* \*

The accompanying map indicates that enemy elements were probably contemplating an attack on Duc Co. The positions mentioned in the two messages are within a ten kilometer radius of the Allied Special Forces camp at Duc Co, which has been a continuing focus of enemy interest in the area.

SEAS for 29 January reviewed tactical messages of recent days, and concluded that communications serving PAVN 1st Division MI elements continued to reflect an impending offensive in western Kontum Province.

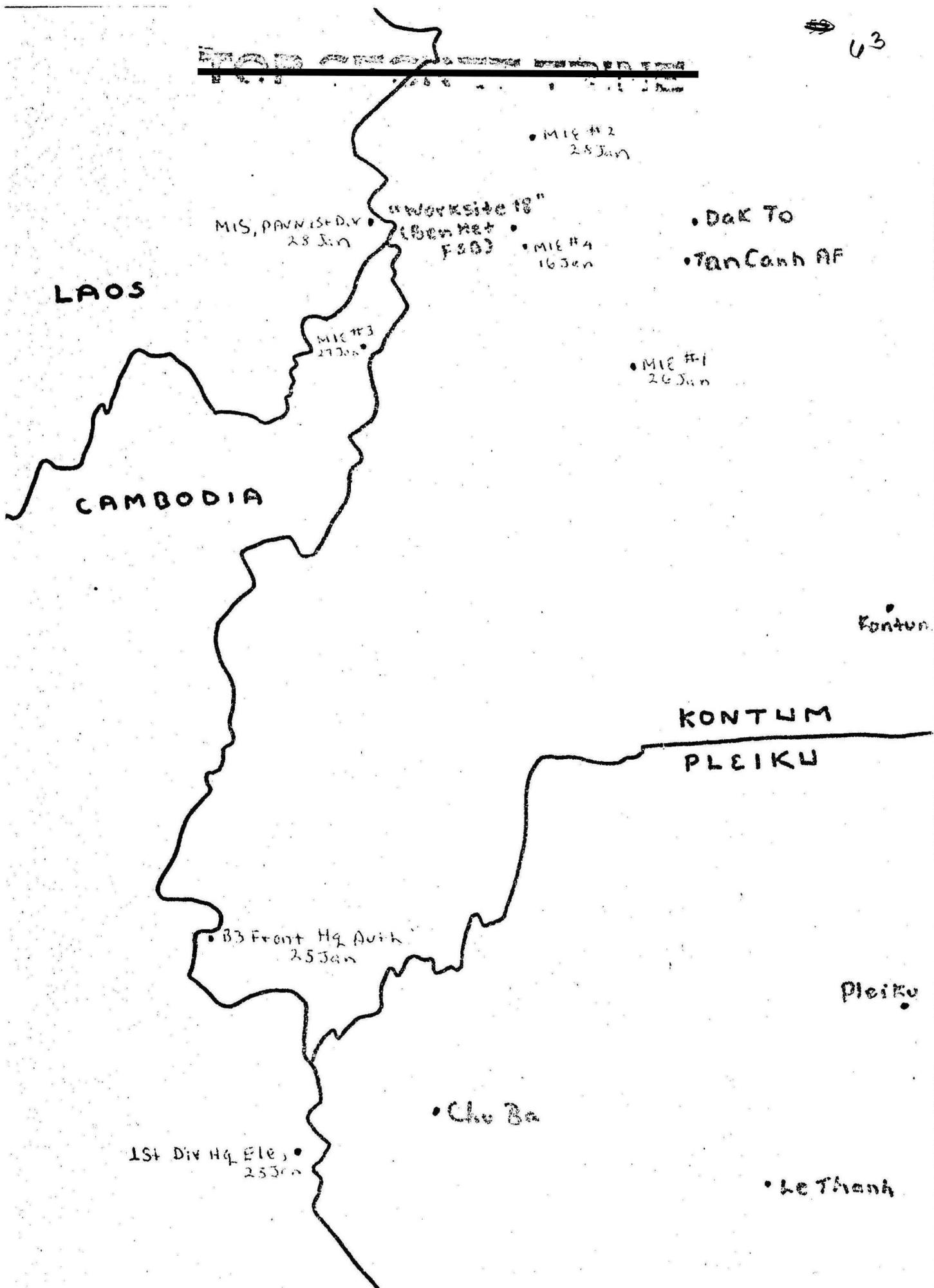
The SEAS noted that messages exchanged 28 January between the Military Intelligence Section (MIS), PAVN 1st Division and a subordinate MI element south of Dak To ((MIE #1 on accompanying map)) indicated that the subordinate was scheduled to launch an attack against a target area designated as B3. As noted earlier, this was the attack scheduled to begin at 0030 hours GOLF on 30 January.

A second subordinate of MIS, 1st Division (MIE #2) relocated approximately 34 kilometers between 14 and 28 January, and was now northwest of Dak To. A third, (MIE #3) located on the Cambodia-Kontum border on 27 January, reported a 17 January engagement with Allied troops while enroute to "E2", to transfer responsibility to "E2". "E" is the standard Vietnamese Communist designation for regiment.

The fourth subordinate of MIS, 1st Division (MIE #4) was located due west of Dak To, and had been reporting on "Worksite 18" ((Ben Het Fire Support Base)) from late November to at least mid-January.

The SEAS also drew attention to the use of letter-digit combinations

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1ST DIVISION MI ELEMENTS DISCUSS  
 ATTACK PLANS IN KONTUM PROVINCE

53  
64

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~



ENEMY ELEMENTS RELOCATE TO AN  
AREA SOUTH OF BAN ME THUOT, LATE  
JANUARY, 1968.

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

as target references. As noted earlier, the B3 Front authority had used the designators "P4" and "P8" in discussing attack plans in Pleiku Province. PAVN 1st Division MI elements had referenced "B3" and "B6" in connection with attack plans in western Kontum. And, in Quang Nam Province, target designators "A1" and "A2" had been observed. The widespread use of such target designators provided further indications of a coordinated offensive.

*65*  
*XP?*  
*earlier?*

The SENS also indicated that an enemy threat was developing in southern Darlac. By 24 January, a Party-associated station whose movements have usually been in conjunction with those of the 3rd Battalion, PAVN 33rd Regiment had relocated approximately 60 kilometers eastward, from Cambodia to southern Darlac, southeast of Ban Me Thuot. In addition, a radio terminal associated with the B3 Front had made a similar relocation of approximately 48 kilometers to the east, to a position south-southwest of Ban Me Thuot.

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3/0/STY/425-68 29 January 1968

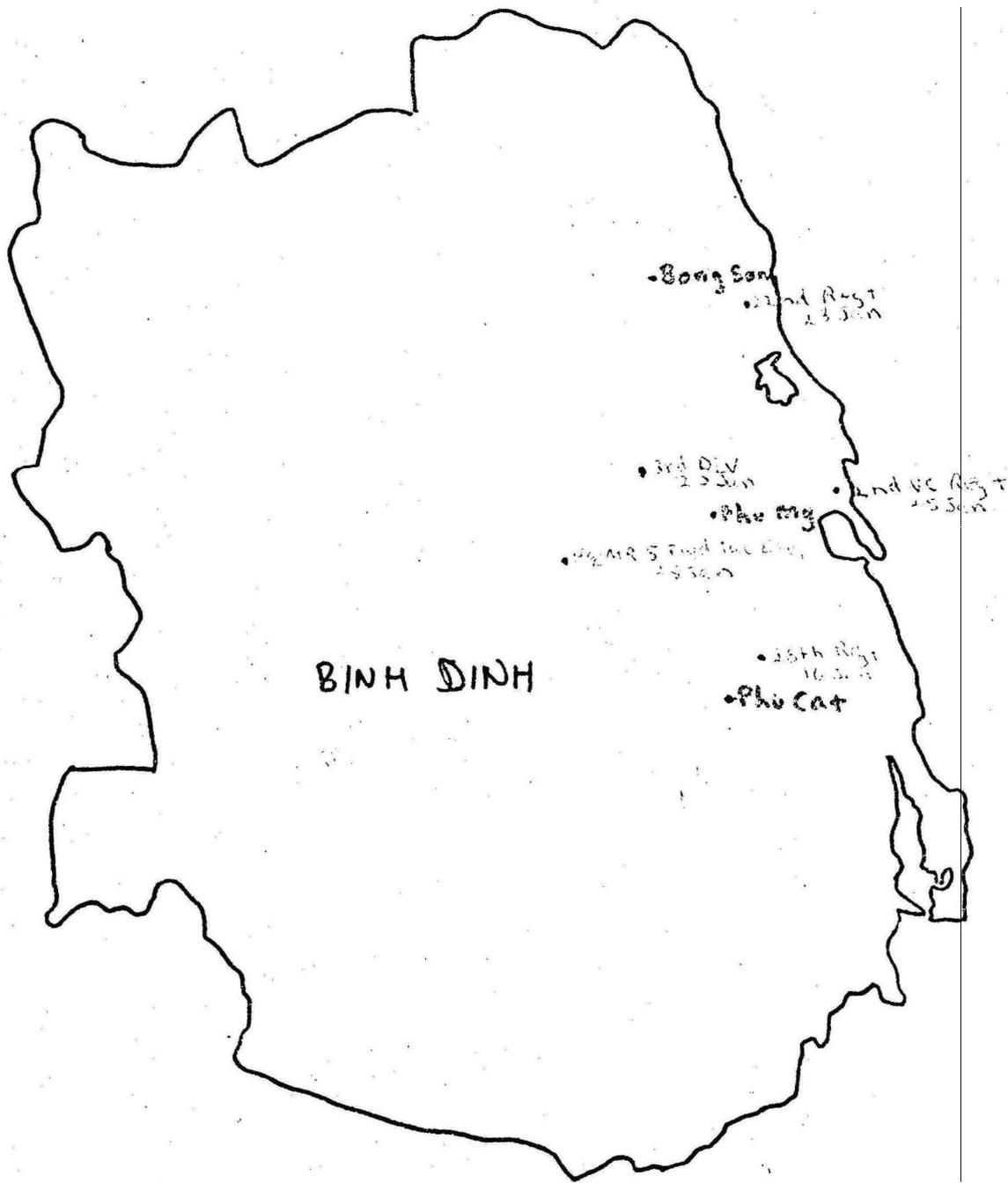
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b. PAVN 2ND, 3RD AND 5TH DIVISIONS, (COASTAL PROVINCES)

During the period 25-29 January, little additional SIGINT information was derived on the activities of the PAVN 3rd Division in Binh Dinh

~~TOP SECRET~~

64



PAVN 3RD DIVISION ELEMENTS CONCENTRATE ALONG COAST, LATE JANUARY, 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

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~~TOP SECRET~~



UNIDENTIFIED CONTROL ELEMENT  
 ORDERS ATTACK IN VICINITY OF  
 ARVN 1ST REGIMENT, 27 JANUARY 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

68

and the Southern Front/PAVN 5th Division in Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa Provinces. The 26 January SENS observed that a concentration of 3rd Division combat elements had developed along the Binh Dinh coast in the Bong Son and Phu My areas.

\*\*\*\*\*  
3/0/STY/R23-68 26 January 1968  
\*\*\*\*\*

A significant amount of information bearing on activities of the PAVN 2nd Division in Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces was received during this <sup>however</sup> period. On 28 January, NSA reported that two unidentified elements in Quang Nam Province had discussed plans "for an N-Day attack". In a 27 January message, the control element had told one of its two subordinates:

"It is no longer necessary to attack the headquarters of the 51st Regiment. Concentrate on preparing A2 for an N-Day attack, and after that, A1. Attack the headquarters of the 51st Regiment only as a last resort and if you are able to carry out the objectives for your unit".

Messages exchanged by these two elements during the period 11-20 January had discussed activities of South Vietnamese Field Police and ARVN 51st Regiment elements, and referenced the maintenance of three 82 mm mortars.

\*\*\*\*\*  
2/0/VCM/R39-68 282120Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 4 TO 2/0/VCM/R32-68  
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As indicated earlier, the observance of target designators "A1" and "A2" in Quang Nam Province, when coupled with references to "P4" and "P8" in Pleiku and "B3" and "B6" in Aontua was further evidence of a planned, coordinated offensive.

As noted earlier, a message passed by NIS, PAVN 1st Division indicated that an attack would start at "B3" at 0030 hours GOLF on the night of 29-30 January. On 28 January, NSA noted that a communications alert was scheduled for implementation in the coastal provinces on 29 January, and concluded that offensive operations might commence on that date:

"Recent SIGINT information indicates that "N-Day" of the impending Vietnamese Communist offensive operation in MR 5 ... may commence on 29 January or shortly thereafter. On 27 January, messages of the Hq, MR 5 Main Force Unit Control instructed various military subordinates operating in the coastal province area of the region, including: Hq, PAVN 2nd and 3rd Divisions; the probable Hq, 2nd Division Forward Element; Hq, PAVN 21st Regiment, 2nd Division; and Hq, Rear Services, Group 44, to commence communications on additional schedules with Hq, MR 5 beginning on 29 January. Communications alerts of this nature have been noted in the past prior to Vietnamese Communist offensive operations. Since the recipients of these instruction included major military units operating in different areas of the coastal provinces of MR 5, it is possible that the indicated communications alert is to occur just prior to or on the impending "N-Day" mentioned in recent MR 5 communications."

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2/O/VCM/A37-68 281615Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 2 TO 2/O/VCM/A32-68

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SEAS for 28 and 29 January continued to reflect movements and prepara-

70

rations for movement by 2nd Division elements. Major moves were under-

taken by the PAVN 3rd Regiment and the Forward Element, 2nd Division.

In addition, Hq, 2nd Division and the 2nd VC and 21st PAVN Regiments

indicated that they were about to move.

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3/0/STY/124-68 28 Jan 68; 3/0/STY/125-68 29 Jan 68

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Thus, by 29 January, significant information concerning the impending enemy offensive had been developed and reported for the MI 5 area. There was evidence in at least two areas that attacks were scheduled to commence on 29 January, during Tet. In Kontum Province, PAVN 1st Division MI elements had discussed an attack scheduled to commence at 0030 hours GOLF on the night of 29-30 January. In the coastal provinces, a general communications alert was scheduled for implementation on 29 January. In the past, such alerts have been instituted immediately preceding major hostile activity by the units involved. The scope of the alert, which involved at least Hq, Group 44 and the 2nd and 3rd Divisions, indicated that the offensive would be widespread. Finally, plans for attacks in western Kontum and Pleiku Provinces and in Quang Nam had been

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discussed in detail, and there were frequent references to letter-digit target designators in these areas. All information pointed to a coordinated attack in MR 5, scheduled to commence on the night of 29-30 January.

3. ARVN III AND IV CORPS AREAS, 25-29 JANUARY

Although there was relatively little additional SIGINT information available on the southern areas of South Vietnam, as compared with the wealth of information derived on MR 5 during the period, there were several significant developments. The 28 January SEAS revealed that the VC 9th Division, which had resumed radio communications with its subordinate regiments on 19 January, had been passing tactical messages to the VC 271st Regiment since 25 January, suggesting that the 271st Regiment was scheduled for early tactical employment.

*Any pentagon reason for this SIGINT shortcoming?*

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3/0/STY/124-68 28 January 1968

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SEAS for 29 January noted that COSVN was continuing to exchange urgent messages with several major enemy headquarters, including Hq, MR 2; Hq, VC 5th Division; and Hq, MR 10. Many of these messages bore the instructions "decrypt immediately". In addition, the NIS, Binh Long Front had moved 30 kilometers south, to west central Binh Long between 19 and 26 January. On that date, the NIS, Binh Long Front reestablished communica-

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tions with the Military Intelligence Bureau, COSVN for the first time in more than a month. Finally, the SEMAS noted that Alternate Hq, MI 2 continued in extremely high message volume, particularly with the My Tho Provincial Unit and the VC 261st Battalion, both in western Dinh Tuong.

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3/0/STY/E25-68 29 January 1968

III THE TET ATTACKS

As had been <sup>reshadowed</sup> indicated by SIGINT information, the enemy Tet Offensive <sup>came</sup> was launched in the early morning hours of 30 January. With few exceptions, attacks on this initial day of the offensive were confined to the ARVN II Corps area. The following day, Tet attacks were launched in I, II and IV CTZ. Although collateral holdings on the composition of the enemy forces which took part in various attacks differ, this section will attempt to provide some indication of the enemy units involved.

A ARVN II CORPS AREA

Because the Tet attacks commenced throughout II Corps one day prior to attacks elsewhere, the organization of this section differs from the organization of the pre-Tet and post-Tet periods. In those, the PAVN 2nd Division area of Quang Nam, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces is treated as part of Vietnamese Communist Military Region 5, since normally, acti-

red

Cont  
73

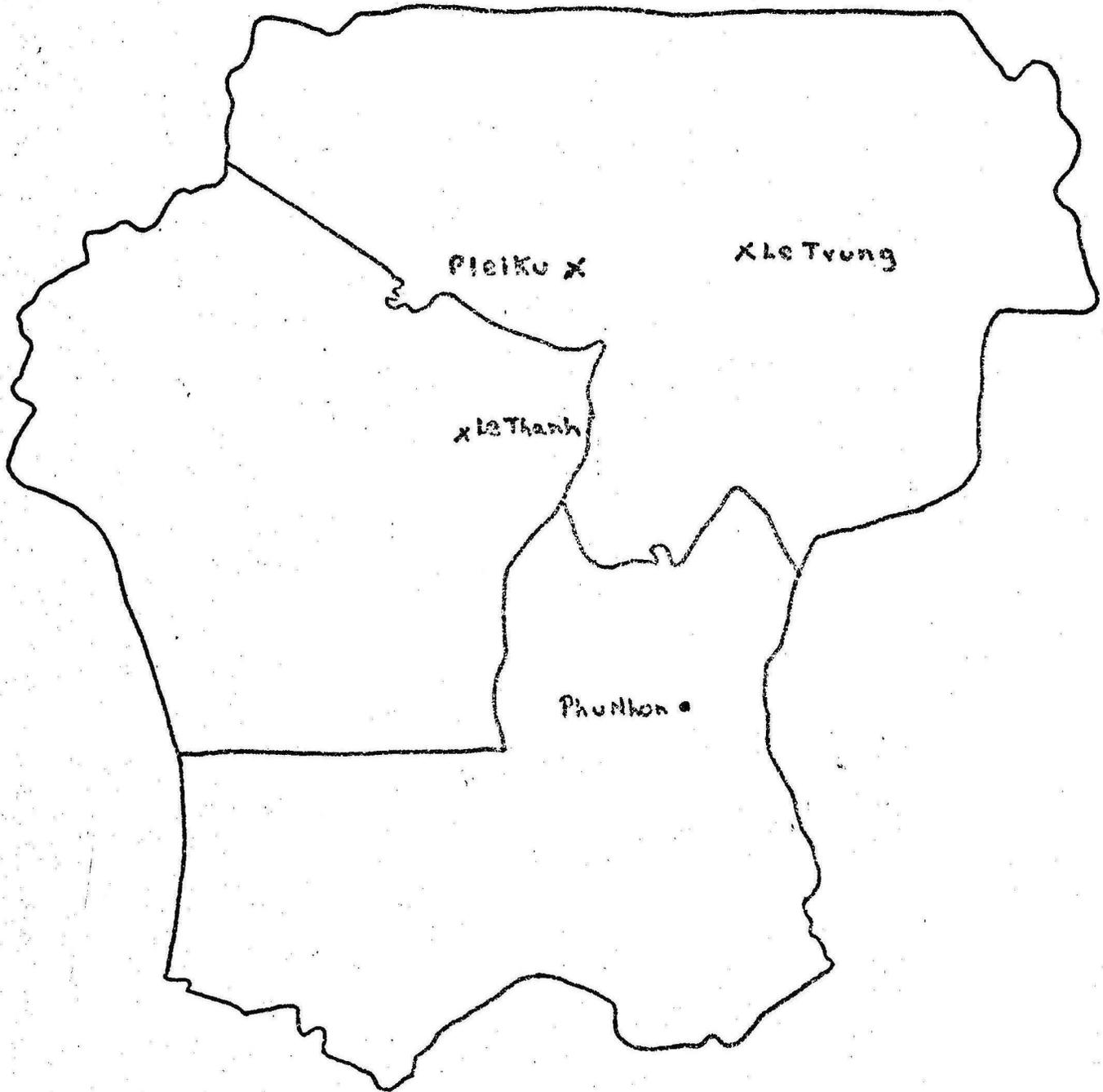
vities of the PAVN 2nd Division are more closely related to activities of other enemy formations in MR 5. However, inasmuch as the Tet attacks in the 2nd Division area did not commence on 30 January, but were launched on 31 January, in connection with attacks elsewhere in the ARVN I Corps area, this section dealing with the Tet attacks will treat the 2nd Division area as part of I Corps.

1. PAVN B3 FRONT AREA (PLEIKU, KONTUM AND DARIAC)

On the night of 29-30 January, Pleiku city was attacked by the VC 407th and 408th Sapper Battalions; the VC H-15 Local Force (LF) Battalion;

~~SECRET~~

74



PLEIKU PROVINCE

~~SECRET~~

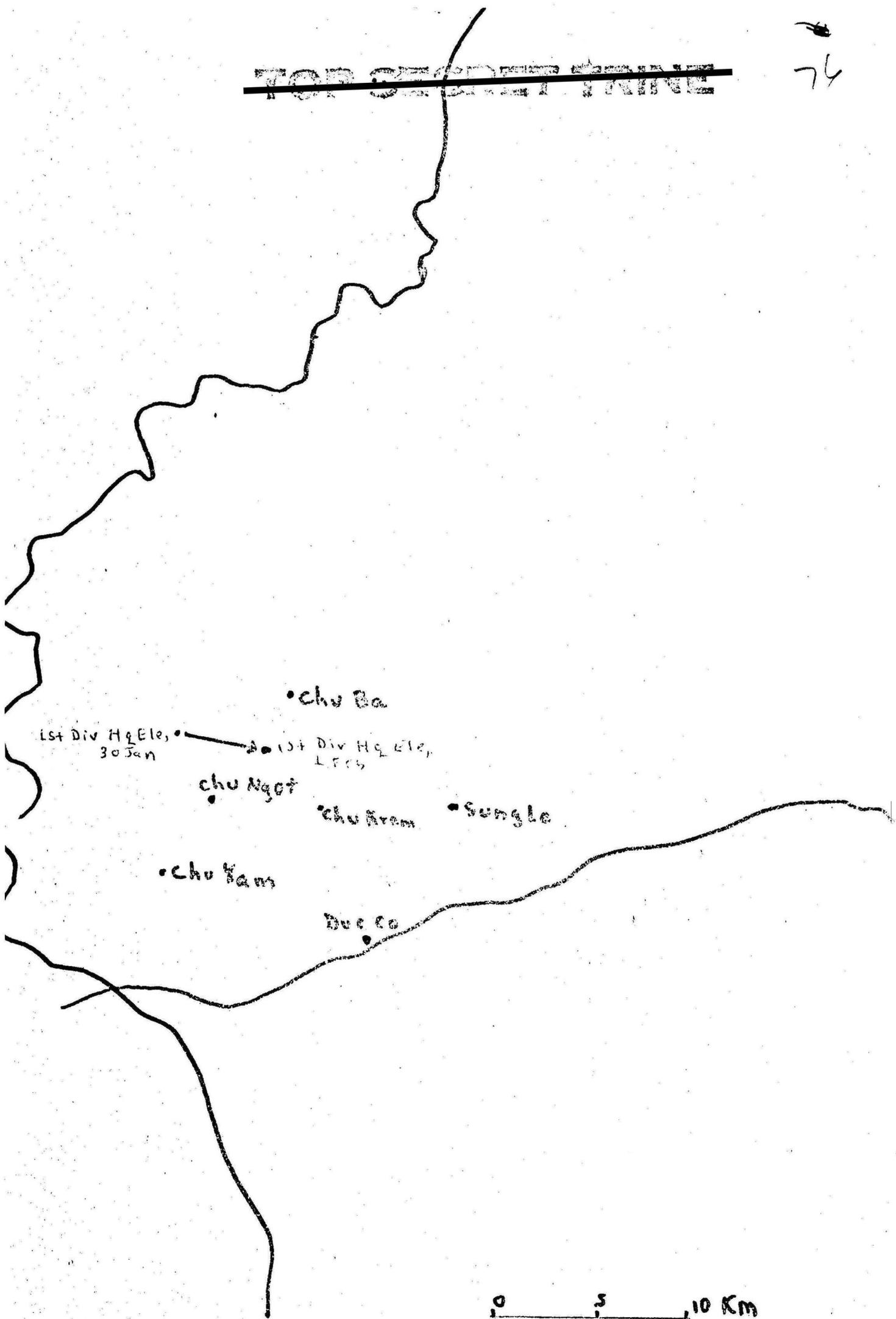
and a battalion of the PAVN 95B Regiment. The city was secured by Allied forces by the end of the day. Reported casualties were: Friendly- 7 KIA and 22 WIA. Enemy- 164 KIA and 94 weapons.

Elsewhere in Pleiku Province, small attacks were conducted against various Allied installations, and the district capitals of Le Thanh and Le Trung were attacked. Enemy elements involved in these attacks included, according to collateral, PAVN 95B Regiment elements; the 200th VC Artillery Battalion; and unidentified elements.

During the next few days, the 1st Division headquarters element in the Pleiku-Cambodia border area continued to keep the B3 Front authority informed on tactical activity in the Chu Ba-Duc Co area. On 31 January, NSA reviewed a message passed by the 1st Division headquarters element at 1453Z, 30 January. The message indicated that enemy elements had occupied positions at Chu Ba and Chu Ngot, and were receiving fire from Allied artillery at Sung Le, and stated that: "tomorrow, we will send forces to probe the summits of Chu Ngot and Chu Ba to determine the enemy situation and to open fire on the enemy mortars". During this transmission, ARDF located the 1st Division Hq element in western Pleiku, just 13 kilometers from Duc Co.

~~TOP SECRET~~

74



PAVN ELEMENTS THREATEN DUC CO,  
30 JANUARY - 2 FEBRUARY, 1968

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2/O/VCM/R48-68 311637Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 11 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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On 1 February, NSA reviewed further message activity by this Hq element which indicated that it had come under fire from Allied artillery at Sung Le. The 1st Division Hq element also informed the B3 Front authority that Allied guns had fired on Chu Ngot, as well. The Hq element indicated that Allied L19s and helicopters were circling the area, and speculated that Allied commandoes might be dropped at Chu Ba during the night. In addition, the 1st Division Hq element reported that B-52s had made two passes over the Chu Ba area. In a later message, the B3 Front authority directed the 1st Division headquarters element to move into the Chu Kram and Chu Yam areas in order to keep track of Allied activity.

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2/O/VCM/R53-68 010736 February 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 14 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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This activity appeared to be directed at preparing for an attack against Duc Co. ARDF information indicated that by 1 February, the 1st Division Hq element had moved a few kilometers closer to Duc Co, and was now just ten kilometers from the post. Its new location placed it in the

midst of the Chu Ba-Chu Ngot-Chu Kram area, where fighting was taking place between Allied troops and unidentified enemy elements under the direction of the 1st Division Hq element.

#### KONTUM PROVINCE

In Kontum Province, Kontum city was attacked by the PAVN 24th Regiment and the VC 304th LF Battalion on the night of 29-30 January. Fighting in the city continued for four days before enemy units were driven out of the city with heavy losses. The attacking force lost a reported 625 killed in the battle for Kontum.

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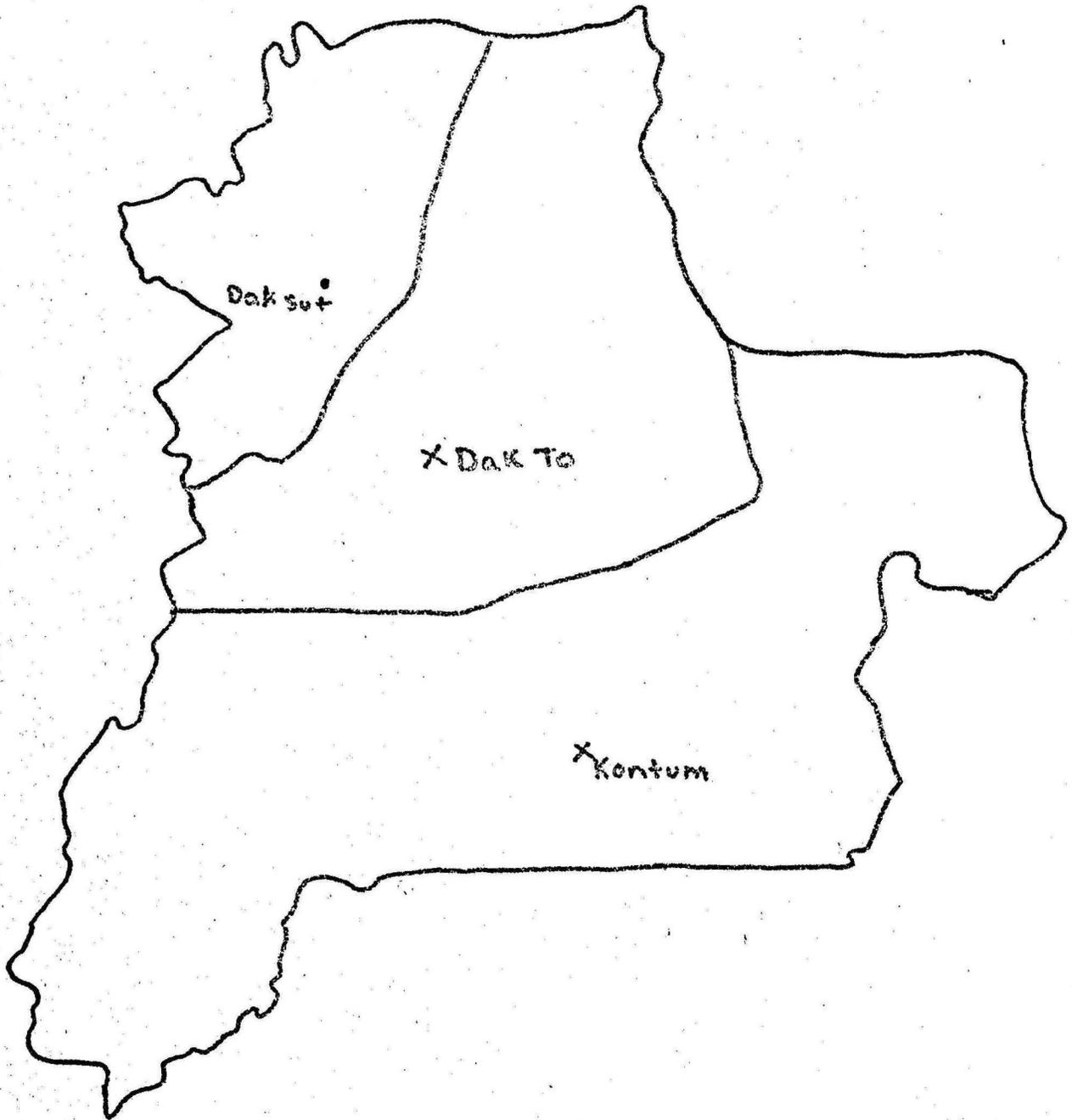
On 30 January, Tan Canh was attacked by mortar fire, and the ensuing fires razed two-thirds of the city. Elsewhere in Kontum Province, elements of the recently-arrived PAVN 40th Artillery Regiment shelled Allied installations.

The 30 January SBAS suggested that the PAVN 32nd Regiment was taking part in Tet attacks. On 29 January, the SBAS noted, the MIS, PAVN 1st Division had informed a subordinate south of Dak To that "an element of K5 will also control B3 with you". K5, the SBAS noted, is a cover designator for the 5th Battalion, 32nd Regiment. On 30 January, the MIS had instructed its subordinate to "contact K5 to determine the enemy situa-

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

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79



KONTUM PROVINCE

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

tion" and to "go ahead and strike if the enemy is still there".

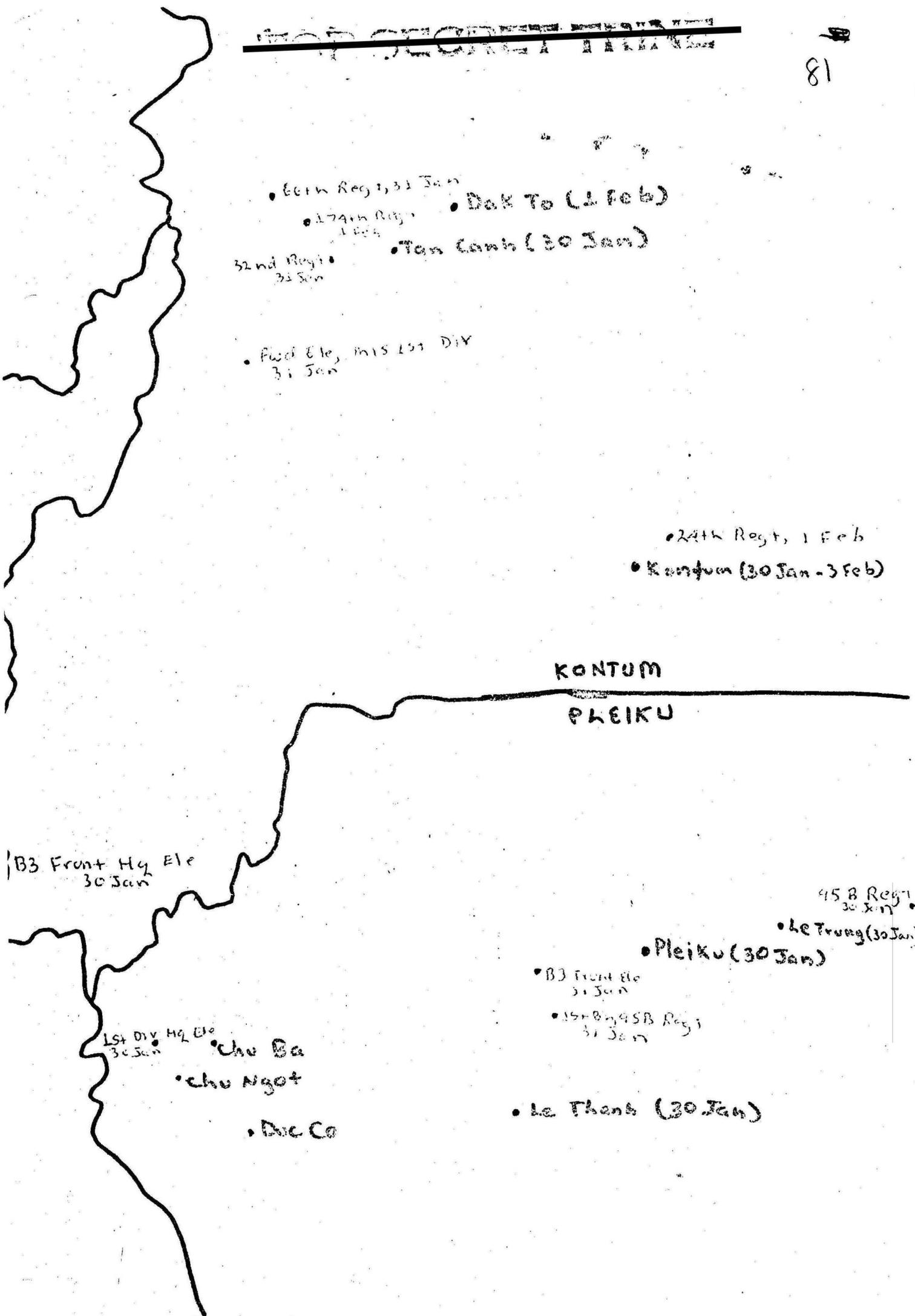
The 31 January SIA3 noted that the MIS, 1st Division had instructed this subordinate to "strike with determination" if there were aircraft or artillery activity in the vicinity of B3. The subordinate element was ordered to take precautions against firing on Communist troops "as the enemy withdraws", and to coordinate orders from higher echelons with its own observations and estimates, in order to "bring off a faultless strike against the enemy".

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3/O/STY/126-68 30 January 1968; 3/O/STY/127-68 31 January 1968

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This same element had been ordered to attack the target area, B3, no later than 0030 hours GOLF on 30 January. This suggests that the area of concern for this element was not Dak To, where an attack was not launched until 1 February, but Kontum city, where a fierce battle raged from 30 January until 3 February. This was further suggested when a new MI element was activated on 31 January to report on the Dak To area. In addition, 174th Regiment elements took part in the assault on Dak To. These 174th Regiment's battalions are numbered 1, 2 and 3, whereas the message activity between the MIS and its subordinate had referenced "K5"- a 5th Battalion. As indicated, the 32nd Regiment has a 5th Battalion. However,



DISPOSITION OF MAJOR B3 FRONT ELEMENTS  
 IN KONTUM AND PLEIKU PROVINCES AT TIME OF TET ATTACKS

the 32nd Regiment remained in the Cambodia-western Kontum border area between 29 and 31 January, well away from Kontum city, the apparent identity of target designator "B3". However, the 24th Regiment, which reportedly was the PAVN regiment involved in the assault on Kontum city, also has a 5th Battalion, <sup>and this</sup> strongly suggested that the message activity between the MIS, 1st Division and its subordinate were referencing the 5th Battalion, 24th Regiment, in connection with the assault on Kontum city.

The apparent equation of "B3" to Kontum city suggests that "B6" was Dak To. As indicated previously, other references to enemy target designators were noted in Pleiku Province, where one message discussed "P4, P8 and Le Thanh". The three major enemy assaults in Pleiku Province were delivered against Pleiku city, Le Trung and Le Thanh, suggesting that "P4" was Pleiku, and "P8" was Le Trung. Designators "A1" and "A2" in Quang Nam Province may have been Danang, rocketed on 30 January, and Hoi An, the provincial capital.

By 31 January, ARDF information was reflecting the presence of the

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PAVN 32nd, 66th and 174th Regiments, within an area between 10 and 20 kilometers west of Dak To. However, collateral reports indicate that the 1 February assaults against Dak To and Tan Canh Airfield were conducted by 174th Regiment elements only.

SIGINT contained some reflections of the attack on Dak To and Tan Canh Airfield. On 1 February, NSA reported that the MIS, 1st Division had ordered a subordinate located northwest of Dak To to "complete the combat mission immediately" and join other Communist elements at Ngoc Tu. In messages of 29 and 31 January, the report continued, MIS 1st Division had passed messages, possibly to the same subordinate discussing attack preparations, and referencing "K3"; possibly 3rd Battalion, 174th Regiment.

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2/O/VCM/R54-68 012022Z February 1968 FOLLOW-UP ME 15 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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In a later message on 1 February, the MIS, PAVN 1st Division ordered this subordinate to bring the troops back to receive a new assignment from "Comrade DOI, the assistant commander of the 3rd Regiment".

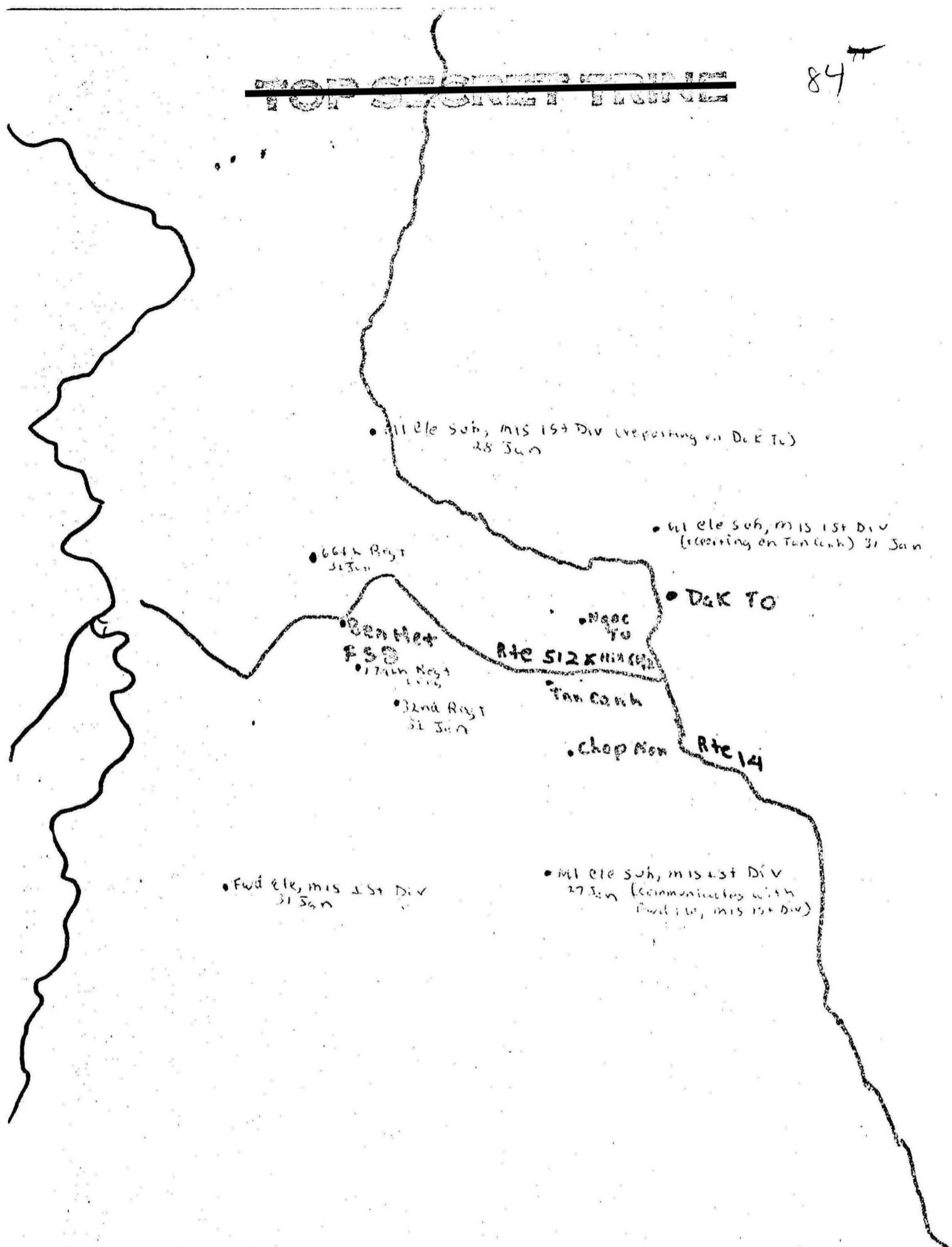
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2/O/VCM/R56-68 020304Z February 1968 FOLLOW-UP ME 17 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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84

~~TOP SECRET FROTH~~  
~~TOP SECRET FROTH~~



• MI ele sub, MIS 1st Div (reporting on Dak To) 28 Jan

• MI ele sub, MIS 1st Div (reporting on Tan Conh) 31 Jan

• 66th Regt 31 Jan

• Dak TO

• Ben Met FSS 17th Regt 31 Jan

• Nac TO

Rte 512 Km (S)

Tan Conh

• 32nd Regt 31 Jan

• Chop Non

Rte 14

• Fwd ele, MIS 1st Div 31 Jan

• MI ele sub, MIS 1st Div 27 Jan (communicates with Fwd 1st, MIS 1st Div)

PAVN ELEMENTS NEAR DAK TO AT TIME OF 1 FEBRUARY ATTACK

~~TOP SECRET FROTH~~

85

In addition, the 1 February SEAS noted that a new MI element had been activated on 31 January, and was reporting to MIS, 1st Division concerning Allied air and ground transport activity in the Tan Canh area.

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3/0/STY/128-68 1 February 1968

Messages passed by 1st Division MI elements on 2 February continued to reflect enemy activity in the Dak To-Tan Canh area. MSA reviewed two of these in a 3 February report. In one message, the MIS, 1st Division was informed by a subordinate that the unit had arrived at "E3", possibly the 3rd Regiment, and had received its assignment. It was currently moving up to the "DK" (possibly recoilless rifle or rocket) element subordinate to E3. This subordinate informed MIS, 1st Division that its unit and the artillery belonging to E40 (40th Artillery Regiment, whose elements took part in the 1 February attacks) were being served by the same 15 watt radio. This MI element, the report noted, was the same one which had been instructed to withdraw to Ngoc Tu on 1 February.

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The other message was passed by the MI element which had earlier been ordered to attack "B3" (possibly Kontum city), and now was closely connected with attacks in the Tan Canh area. This element asked the Forward Element, MIS, 1st Division if there were any Allied troops at Chop Kon, south of Tan Canh. The Forward Element later replied that there were none, but that there were troops at Hill 642, northeast of Tan Canh.

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2/O/VCM/R62-68 032105Z February 1968 FOLLOW-UP RM 22 TO 2/O/VCM/R32-68

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DARLAC PROVINCE

In Darlac, the major enemy assault was delivered against Ban Me Thuot. The PAVN 33rd Regiment joined the VC E-301st Local Force Battalion in this attack. Enemy elements held out in Ban Me Thuot from 30 January to 3 February before being driven from the city. Friendly casualties were 62 KIA and 139 WIA; the attackers lost a reported 238 KIA and over 100 weapons.

ALDF information contained reflections of the fighting. SIGINT had earlier reported the move of a Party element associated with the 3rd Battalion, 33rd Regiment into an area south of Ban Me Thuot, in conjunction with a similar move executed by an unidentified B3 Front element. On 31 January NSA reported that as of 30 January, a major concentration of ene-

87

my elements had developed in the immediate vicinity of Ban Me Thuot.

Approximately thirteen enemy radio terminals were clustered in two separate areas of concentration, immediately south and southwest of Ban Me Thuot.

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2/O/VCH/R52-68 312304Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP ME 13 TO 2/O/VCH/R32-68

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SRAS for 1 February reported that a newly-activated subordinate of MIS, Hq, B3 Front was located just four kilometers from Ban Me Thuot on 30 January.

\* \* \* \* \*

3/O/STY/A28-68 1 February 1968

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Elsewhere in Darlac Province, attacks were conducted against the capitals of the remaining three districts of Buon Ho, Lac Thien and Thuan Hieu. Collateral sources indicate that the VC H-5, 86th and 88th LF Battalions and the VC 381st and 481st Sapper Battalions were among the units involved.

In the southernmost area of the A.VK II Corps area, which include Quang Duc, Tuyen Duc, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan and Lam Dong Provinces, two provinces were spared major attacks. These were Quang Duc and Lam Dong Provinces. In Ninh Thuan Province, a small enemy force, estimated as a

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~~TOP SECRET~~



ENEMY ELEMENTS CONCENTRATE  
NEAR BAN ME THUOT, 30 JANUARY 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

P9



DARLAC, QUANG DUC, LAM DONG, TUYEN DUC,  
BINH THUAN AND NINH THUAN PROVINCES.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

90

local force company approximately 100 strong, assaulted the provincial capital of Phan Rang.

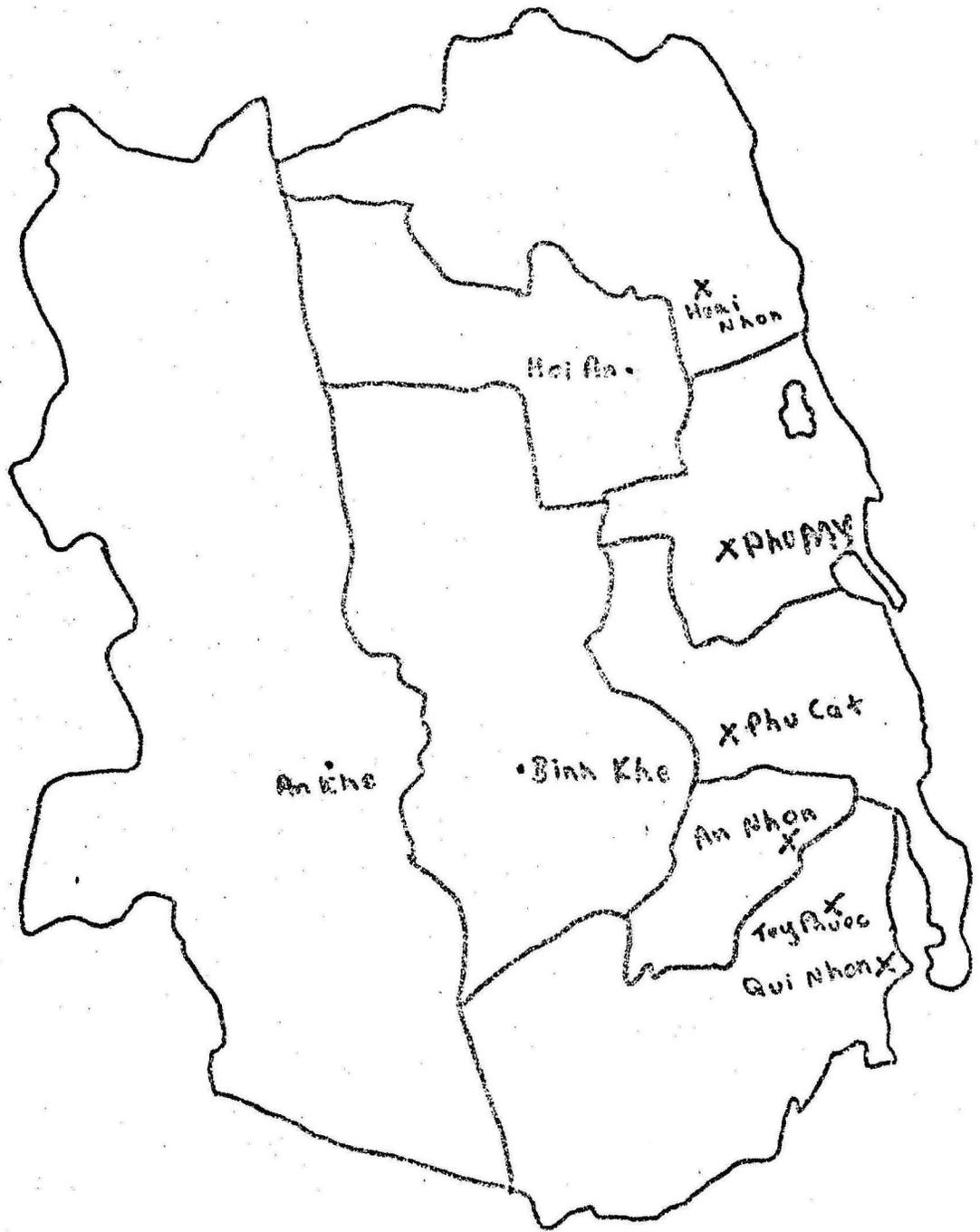
Attacks in Tuyen Duc and Binh Thuan were more severe. In Tuyen Duc, the provincial capital of Dalat was attacked by major elements of the VC 145th and 186th Main Force (MF) Battalions, which clung to strong points in the city for three weeks. In Binh Thuan, the VC 182nd MF Battalion and 840th MF Battalion attacked the provincial capital of Phan Rang on 31 January, and held parts of the city for several days. Local VC elements attacked Than Giao District Headquarters.

## 2. PAVN 3RD DIVISION AREA (BINH DINH)

In Binh Dinh Province, Tet attacks also commenced in the predawn hours of 30 January. The major attack was directed against the provincial capital of Qui Nhon, but friendly forces cleared the city by nightfall. In addition, five of the eight district headquarters in Binh Dinh Province were attacked. All five were coastal districts; the capitals of the three interior districts were not subjected to attack.

~~SECRET~~

91 AB



BINH DINH PROVINCE

~~SECRET~~

Although SIGINT reflected the presence of all three regimental subordinates of the 3rd Division in coastal areas in late January, collateral sources believed that only 18th Regiment elements were involved in Tet attacks. The 2nd VC Regiment had been damaged in several engagements during December and January, and the PAVN 22nd Regiment had suffered severe losses on the Song Son Plain in December. The 18th Regiment had been heavily engaged near Phu Cat on 23 and 24 January, but took part in Tet attacks despite the severe losses it had taken *rather*.

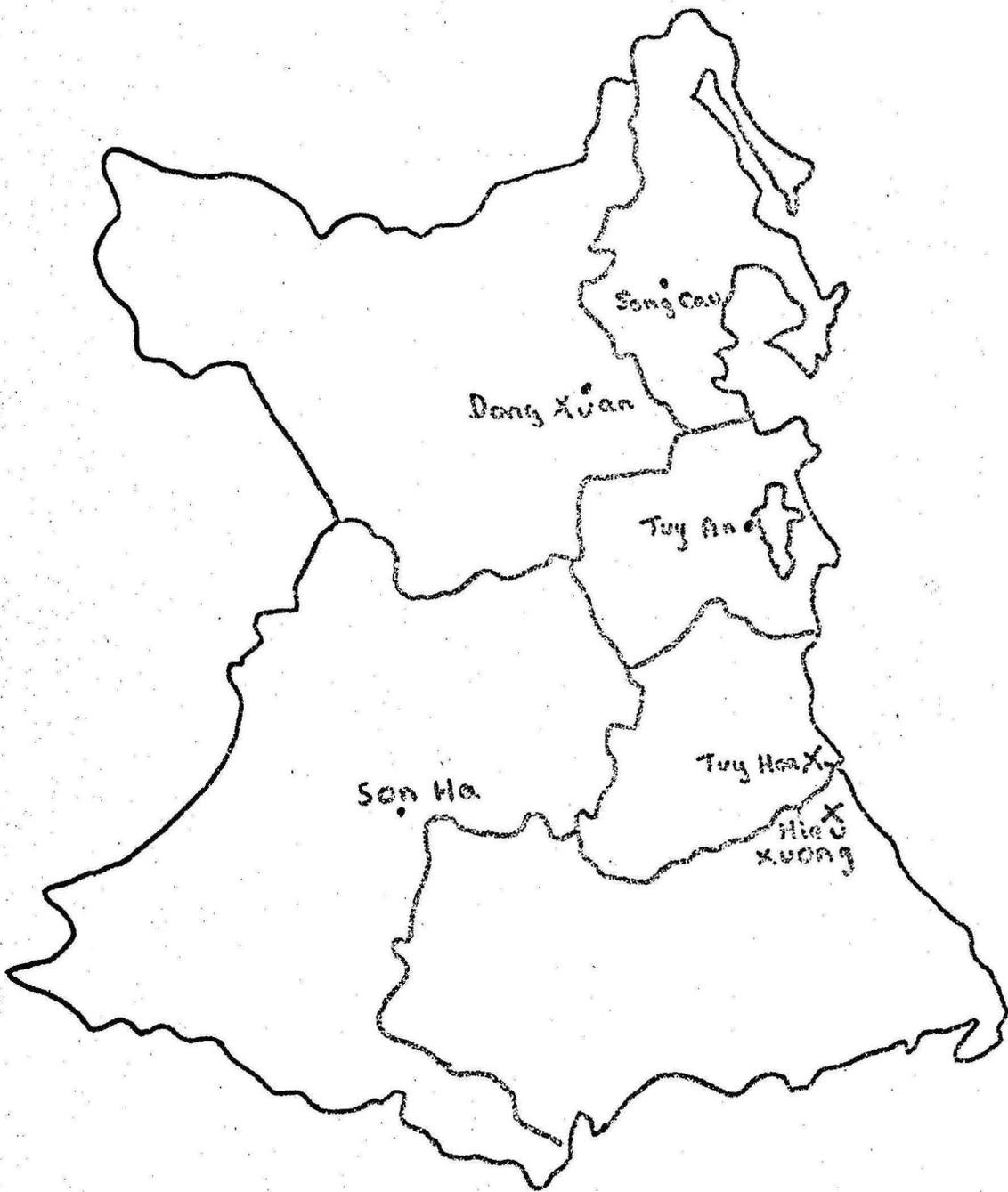
Collateral sources hold the VC 36th and 36B Sapper Battalions and the VC E 210th LF Battalion as the major VC units which joined 18th Regiment elements in these attacks.

### 3. SOUTHERN FRONT/PAVN 5TH DIVISION AREA (PHU YEN AND KHANH HOA)

In the Southern Front/PAVN 5th Division area, several major attacks took place on 30 January. In Phu Yen, the provincial capital of Tuy Hoa and the district capital of Hieu Xong were attacked on 30 January. Elements of the PAVN 95th Regiment joined the VC 30th LF Battalion and the VC 85th Battalion in these assaults. On 31 January, the 5th Battalion, PAVN 95th Regiment attacked Tuy Hoa North Airfield, and lost over 200 killed. Allied losses were 24 KIA and 97 MIA in this clash.

93

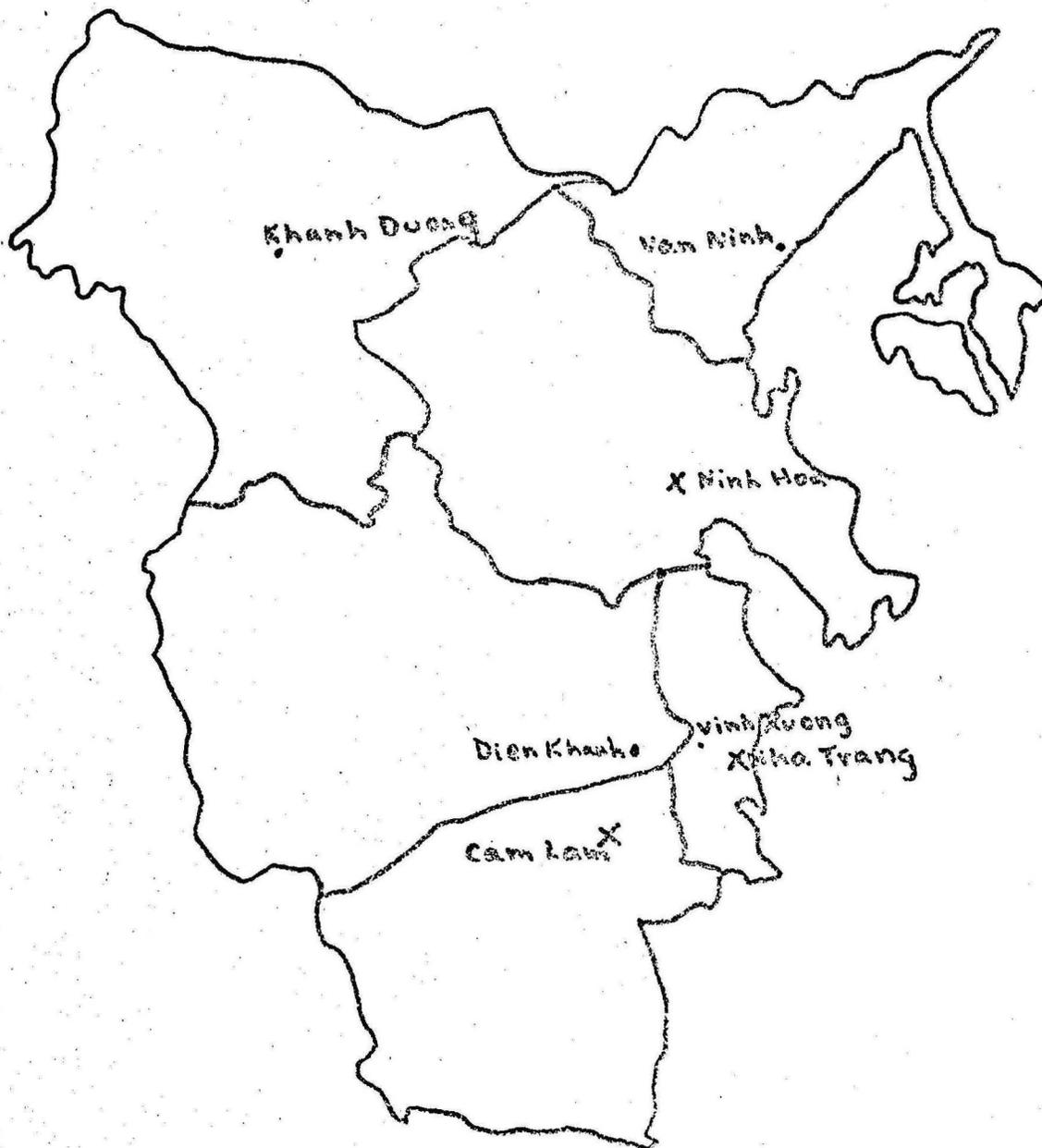
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PHU YEN PROVINCE

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KHANH HOA PROVINCE

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In Khanh Hoa Province, major attacks were delivered against Nha Trang, the Provincial capital, and the district capitals Ninh Hoa and Cam Lam. The 7th Battalion, PAVN 18B Regiment was reportedly involved in the attack on Nha Trang. Enemy elements remained in Nha Trang for several days before being forced to retreat, leaving more than 200 dead, and nearly 100 weapons behind. Friendly losses were 54 killed and 95 wounded.

Other 18B Regiment elements were reportedly engaged at Ninh Hoa District Town. Three enemy sapper companies, the K90th, K91st and T86th, supported the assaults of 18B Regiment elements on Nha Trang and Ninh Hoa. Other enemy elements participating in attacks elsewhere in Khanh Hoa, including the assault against Cam Lam, included the T88th Sapper Company and the PAVN 95th Artillery Battalion, according to collateral sources.

## B. I CORPS AREA

### 1. PAVN 2ND DIVISION AREA (QUANG NAM, QUANG TIN AND QUANG NGAI)

With the exception of a fire attack against Danang on the night of

29-30 January, TET attacks in I Corps did not begin until 31 January, a day later than attacks in II Corps. Thus, Allied forces had an extra day of warning in this area.

96

On 30 January, NSA reported that the PAVN 2nd Division was now employing tactical communications:

"Information recently available indicates that the Hq, PAVN 2nd Division implemented a tactical communications plan on 30 January. Communications plans of this nature are normally activated by Vietnamese Communist military units for offensive operations. All major elements of the PAVN 2nd Division are currently concentrated in the eastern Quang Nam-Quang Tin Province area. ..."

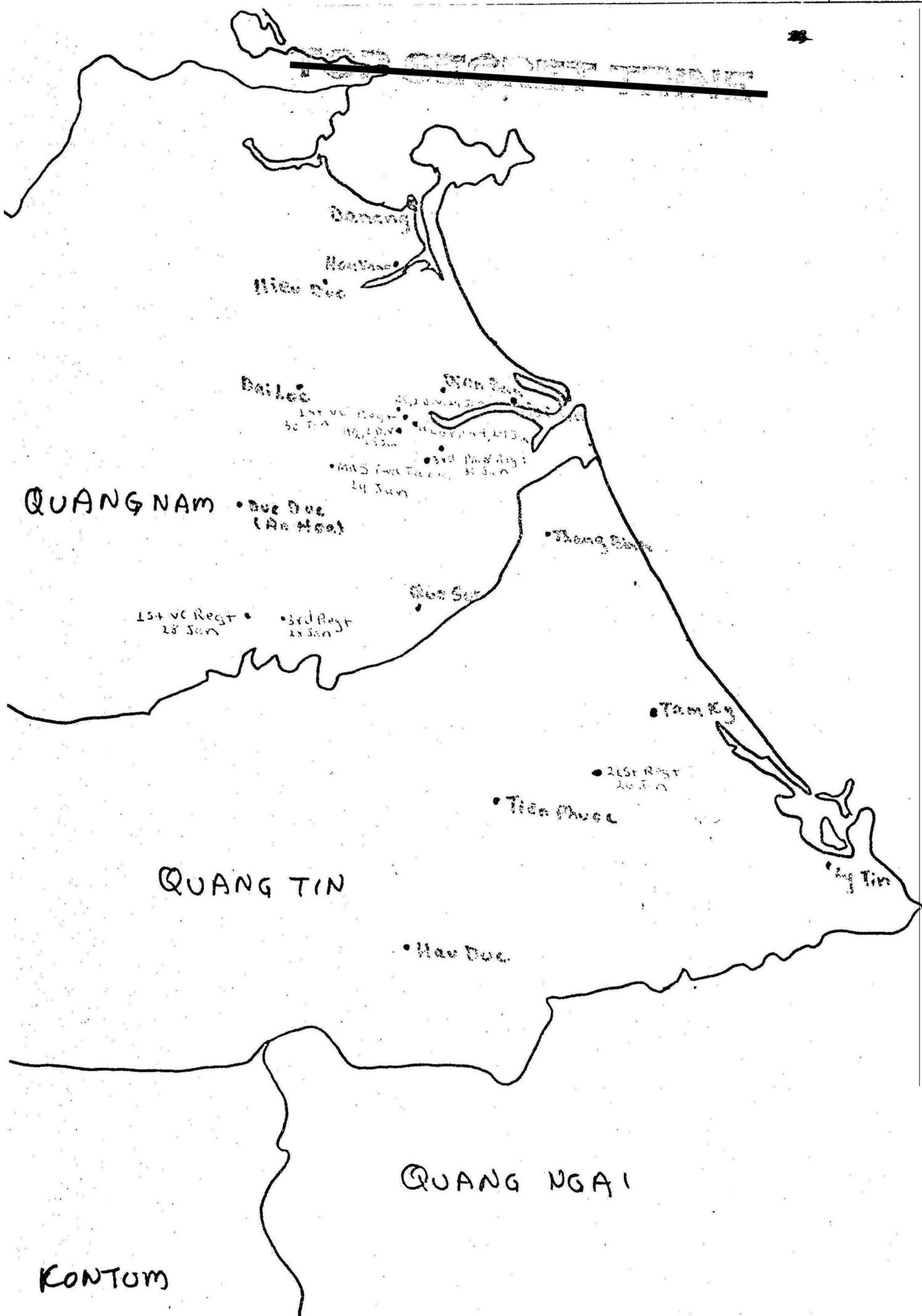
The report then detailed the current dispositions of 2nd Division elements, and noted that several subordinates of Group 44 were in the same area.

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2/0/VCM/147-68 302155Z January 1968 FOLLOW-UP NR 10 TO 2/0/VCM/132-68

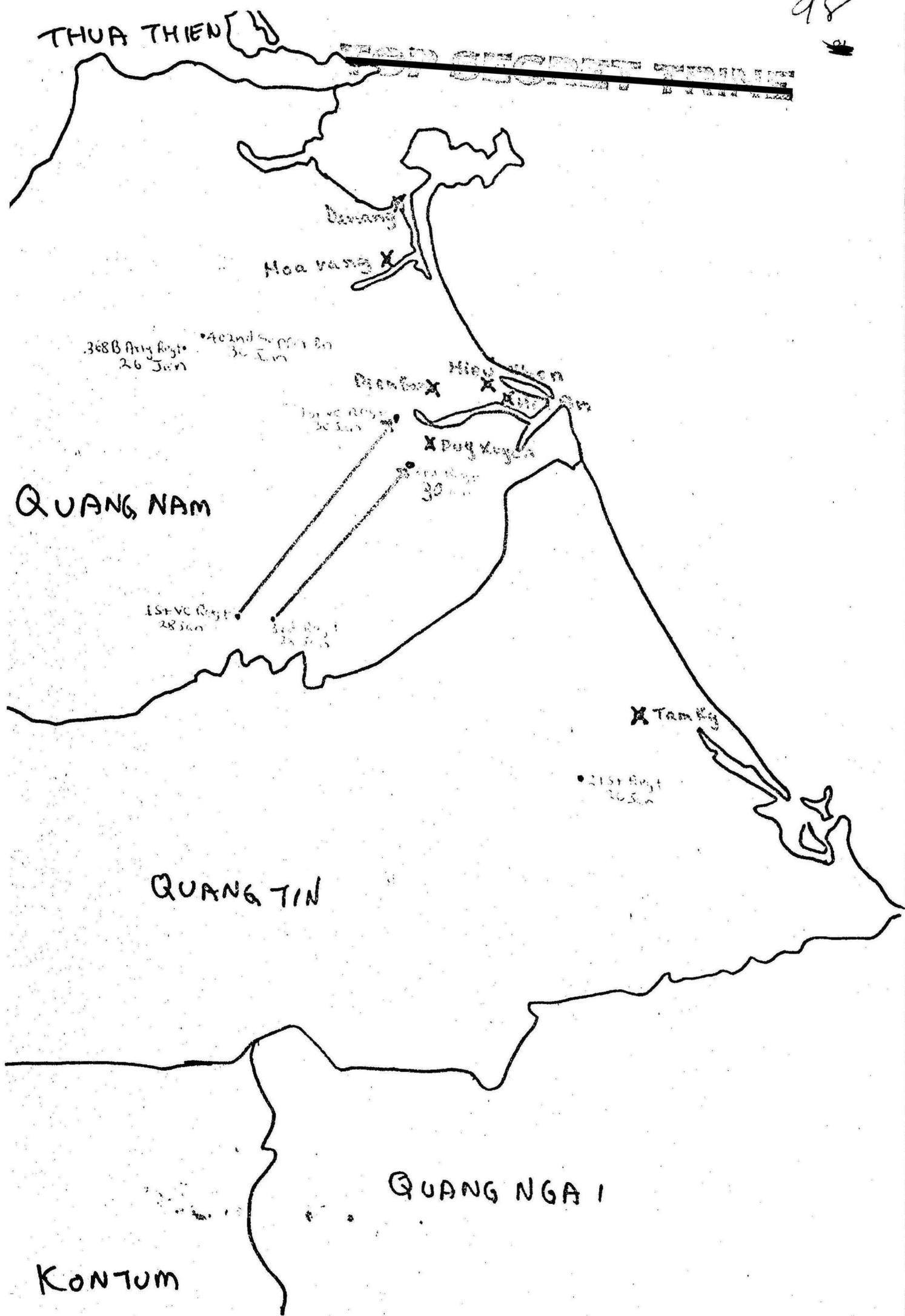
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ARDF fixes obtained on the 1st VC and 3rd PAVN regiments on 30 January reflected a parallel movement by these two units since 28 January. Both relocated approximately 20-25 kilometers, from the Quang Nam-Quang Tin border to positions in close proximity to a complex of South Vietnamese district headquarters along the Quang Nam coast. That same day, ARDF fixed the 402nd Sapper Battalion within 25 kilometers of Danang. SEAS for 30 January reported that the MA 5 Forward



PAVN 2ND DIVISION ELEMENTS INITIATE TACTICAL COMMUNICATIONS, 30 JANUARY 1968

98



2ND DIVISION COMBAT ELEMENTS  
JUST PRIOR TO ATTACKS IN QUANG NAM-QUANG TIN

Tactical Element had relocated approximately 10 kilometers from its 28 January position in Quang Tin Province, and as of 29 January, this headquarters was now in Quang Nam Province, approximately 20 kilometers from Hoi An, and into a cluster of enemy terminals which now included Hq, Group 44; HQ 5 Forward Tactical Element; Hq, 2nd Division and its Forward Element; 1st VC Regiment; and 3rd PAVN Regiment.

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3/0/STY/126-68 30 January 1968

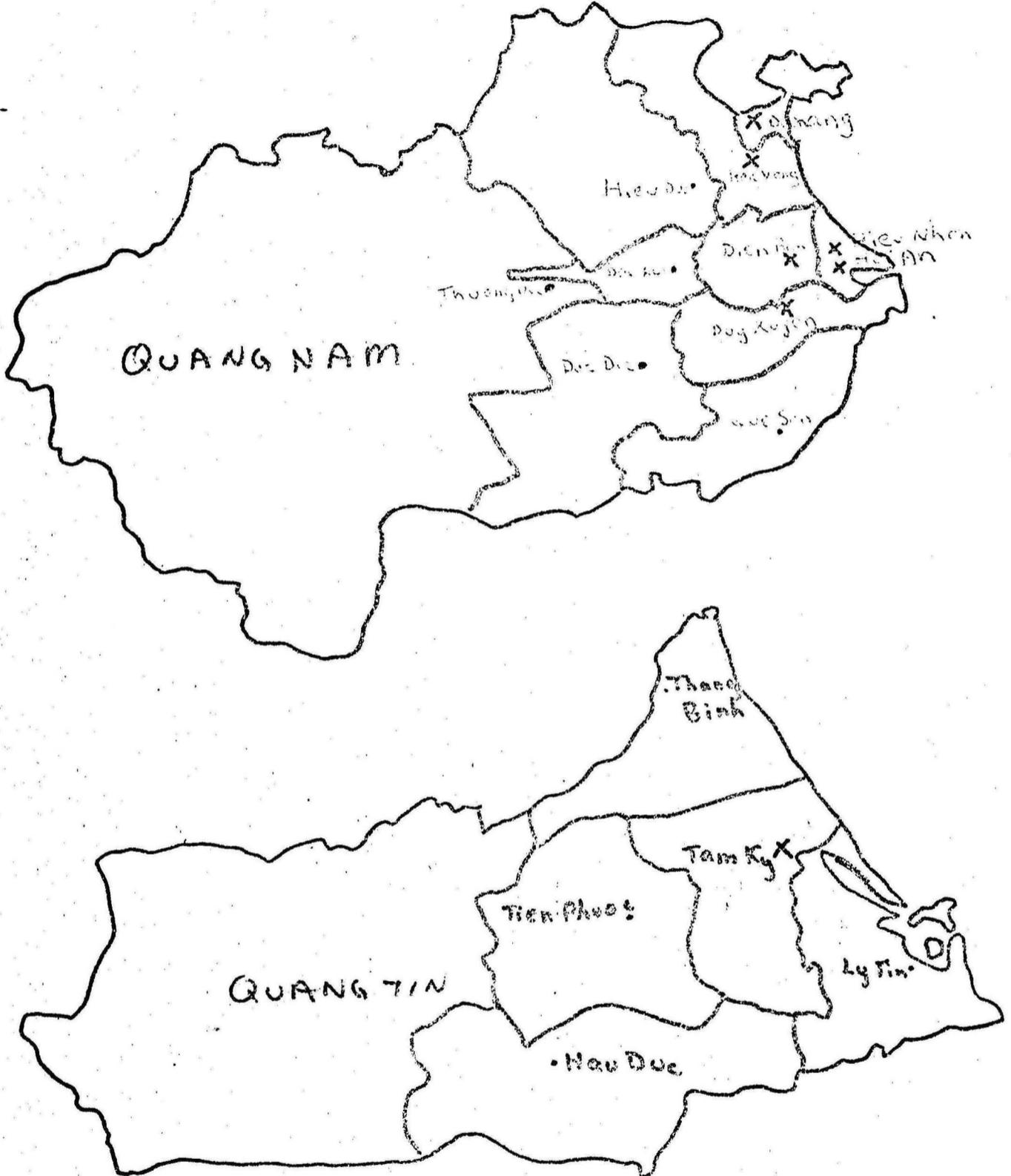
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The 31 January attacks in Quang Nam Province struck Danang; Hoi An, the provincial capital; and the capitals of the four districts which line the Quang Nam coast. As in the case of Binh Dinh Province, the four interior district towns were not attacked.

Danang was rocketed and mortared several times by the PAVN 368B Artillery Regiment between 30 January and 3 February, and Allied installations were attacked by the 402nd Sapper Battalion and the 120th VC LF Battalion. Hoi An was attacked by 3rd Regiment elements and the V-25 LF Battalion, according to collateral. The district capitals of Hoa Vang, Duy Xuyen, Hieu Non and Dien Ban were also attacked. In addition to local elements, collateral sources believe that PAVN 31st <sup>stated</sup>

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~~TOP SECRET AREA 1~~

100



QUANG NAM AND QUANG TIN PROVINCES

~~SECRET~~  
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101

Regiment elements took part in attacks elsewhere in Quang Nam. Although SIGINT indicated that the 1st VC Regiment relocated to the immediate attack area, in conjunction with the move of the PAVN 3rd Regiment, which did take part in wet attacks, collateral sources do not list the 1st VC Regiment as having participated in these attacks. Its position strongly suggests that it was held in reserve, to follow up the attacks, or counter Allied reaction forces.

In Quang Tin Province, the only major assault was conducted against the provincial capital, Tam Ky, on 31 January. As indicated by its late January relocation to the Tam Ky area, PAVN 21st Regiment elements took part in this attack. In addition, collateral indicates that a newly-formed Quang Tin Provincial Force, composed of the VC 70th, 72nd and 74th LF Battalions were involved in the attack on Tam Ky, as were scattered local VC elements. Enemy forces were pushed out of Tam Ky with heavy losses- 282 dead and over 100 weapons, as compared with Allied losses of 3 killed and 56 wounded.

In Quang Ngai, the southernmost province of I Corps, where both PAVN 2nd and 3rd Division elements have operated, the most significant attack was launched against Quang Ngai city on 31 January. All major VC units in Quang Ngai Province reportedly took part in this

101A

attack. The VC organized these elements into two new regimental formations, according to collateral. The 401st Sapper Regiment was reportedly formed from the VC 405th and 406th Sapper Battalions; the 107th AA Battalion; and the 120th Montagnard Battalion. The VC 38th, 48th and 81st LF Battalions were reportedly organized into the 328th VC Regiment. Preliminary casualty totals listed Allied dead at 51, with an additional 140 wounded. The enemy force was badly hurt, losing 642 killed, according to preliminary figures, and leaving 190 individual weapons and 42 crew-served weapons on the battlefield. Revised figures later estimated enemy losses as over 800 in the assault on

102

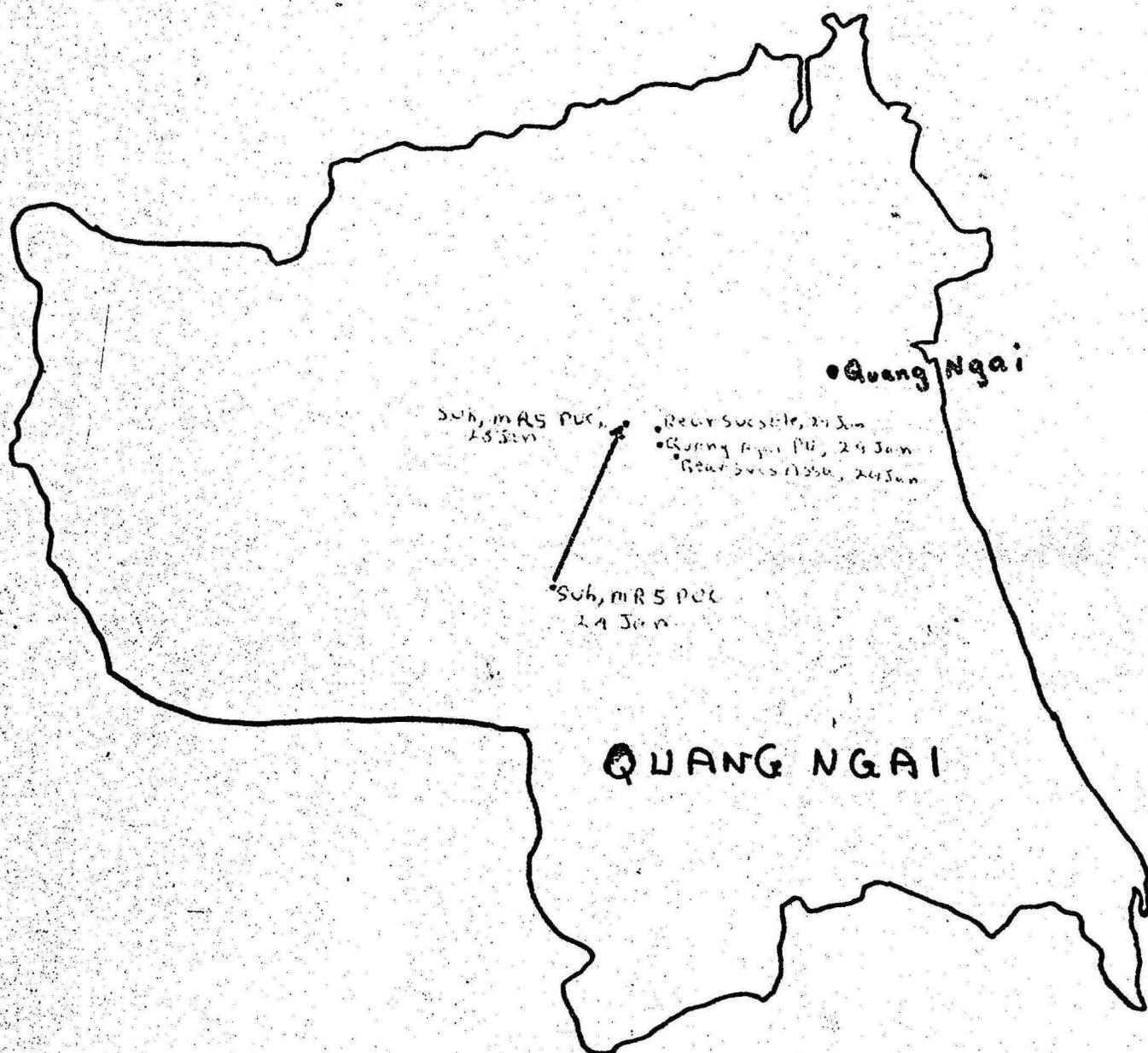
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QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

~~SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~



ENEMY ELEMENTS CONCENTRATE WEST OF QUANG NGAI CITY PRIOR TO TET ATTACKS

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

Quang Ngai city. In addition to this assault, other local VC forces in Quang Ngai Province attacked four district towns; Son Tinh, Mo Duc, Nghia Hanh and Binh Son.

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SIGINT had revealed little information on enemy plans in Quang Ngai Province prior to the attack. The chief indicator of forthcoming attacks was the development of a concentration of enemy elements in an area approximately 20 kilometers west of Quang Ngai city by 29 January. ARDF reports indicated that the Quang Ngai Provincial Unit; a subordinate of the ML 5 Provincial Unit Control; and two subordinates of Rear Services, Group 44 were involved.

## 2. MI TTH (QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN)

In Quang Tri Province, attacks commenced on 31 January. Again, the heaviest attack was directed against the provincial capital, Quang Tri city. Elements of the PAVN 812th Regiment and at least two battalions of the PAVN 5th Regiment reportedly took part in this attack. SIGINT had reflected the move of the 812th Regiment from the immediate DMZ area to a position on the Quang Tri-Thua Thien Province border by 20 January, approximately 20 kilometers south-southwest of Quang Tri city. As of the time of the collateral estimate, friendly casualties

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QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN PROVINCES

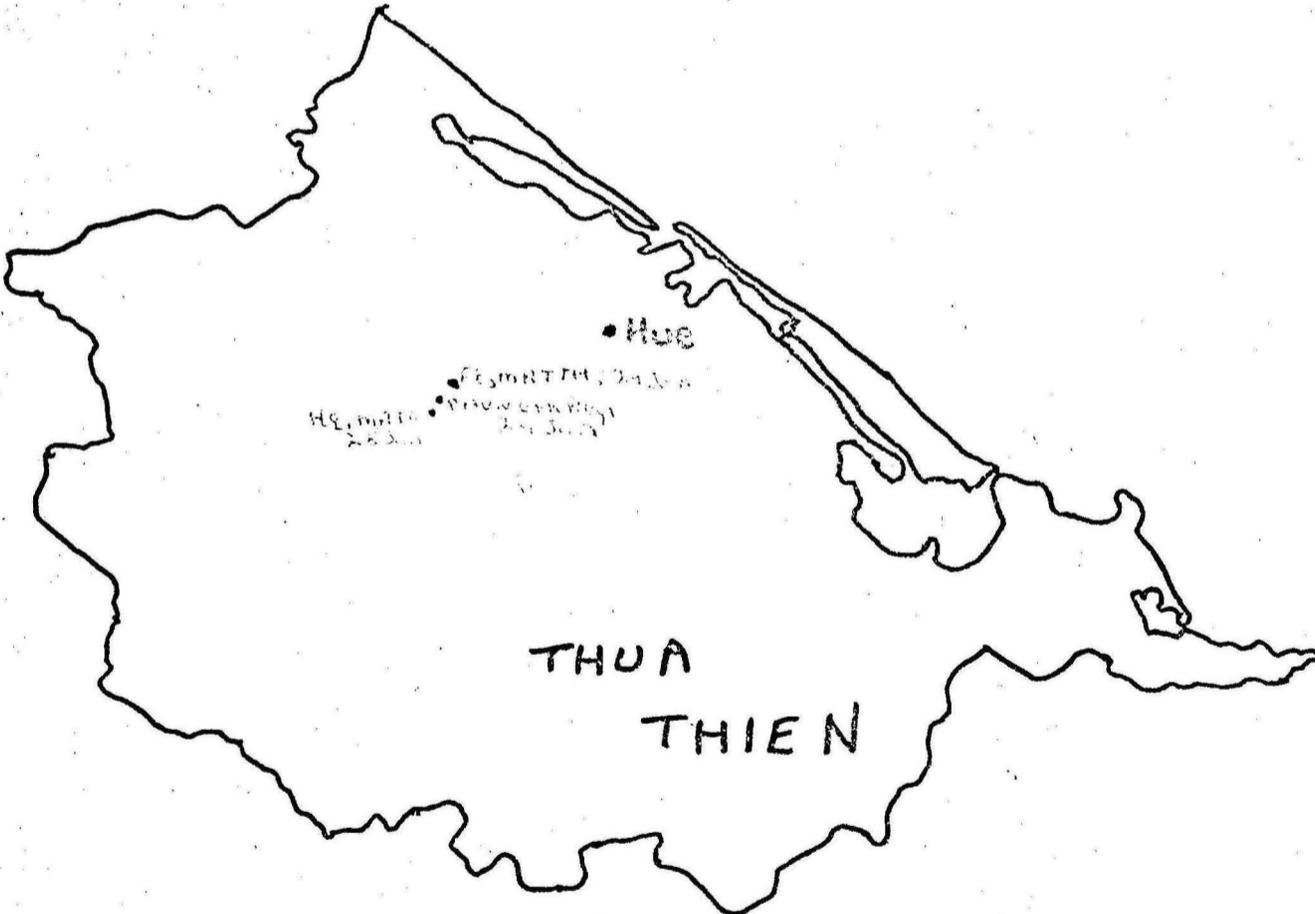
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were unknown; enemy casualties were reported as 868 killed. In addition, the enemy abandoned nearly 200 individual and 36 crew served weapons.

Elsewhere in Quang Tri Province, the district towns of Trieu Phong, Mai Linh, Cam Lo and Hai Lang were attacked. Elements of the 7th Battalion, PAVN 29th Regiment reportedly attacked Hai Lang on 1 February. On 2 February, PAVN elements, reportedly from the 270th Independent Regiment or the 27th Independent Battalion lost 111 killed at Cam Lo, and on 5 February, PAVN elements attacked Trieu Phong. Collateral estimates suggest that over 6,000 enemy troops were committed to Tet attacks in Quang Tri Province, which, if valid, far exceeds the number believed committed in any other province. Pleiku Province, where collateral estimates that 4,500-5,000 enemy soldiers were engaged, is closest to Quang Tri in collateral estimates of the size of the enemy force engaged in Tet attacks.

The most devastating attack in the northern provinces was launched against Hue on 31 January. Other major attacks in Thua Thien Province included the assault of Phu Loc District Headquarters by elements of the IVC 804th Battalion, 4th Regiment, and the mortaring of Phu Bai.

~~TOP SECRET~~



ENEMY ELEMENTS GATHER NEAR  
HUE IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO ATTACK  
AGAINST HUE

Prior to the attack on Hue, SIGINT had indicated a clustering of enemy radio terminals in the Hue area, as noted earlier. By 29 January, ARDF information indicated that the PAVN 6th Regiment; Hq, III TTH; and Forward Element, III TTH were within a two kilometer radius, approximately 15 kilometers from Hue. 108

On 31 January, elements of the PAVN 4th, 6th and 29th Regiments, with the Hue Sapper Battalion, and other local units, attacked Hue and occupied large sections of the city. They released 2500 prisoners from the city jail, and immediately conscripted at least 500 of them. Enemy elements stubbornly clung to portions of the city before being driven across the river. They destroyed the bridge across the Huong River, which runs through the heart of Hue, and eventually withdrew to the Imperial City. Despite the insertion of US Marines, enemy elements continued to hold on to well-prepared positions in the citadel, and the Viet Cong flag continued to fly over the Imperial City.

While US Marines attempted to clear the city, 1st Cavalry Division elements attempted to prevent reinforcements from reaching the Communists. On 3 February, the 2/12th Cavalry Regiment killed 85 enemy troops in a fire fight near Hue. By 7 February, cumulative casualties for the Hue battle totalled 211 Allied troops killed and 962 wounded. The enemy force had already lost over 2,000 dead.



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The 6 February SEAS revealed that since 26 January, major enemy elements in MR TTH had been using a new tactical signal plan. The SEAS noted that users of this plan included the Forward Element, Hq, MR TTH; the Hue Municipal Unit; the PAVN 6th and 9th Regiments; and probably Hq, MR TTH. The Hue Municipal Unit; Forward Element, MR TTH; and two unidentified control elements were communicating with at least 16 subordinates in this new signal plan. ADF results for early February continued to reveal a substantial concentration of enemy forces in the area.

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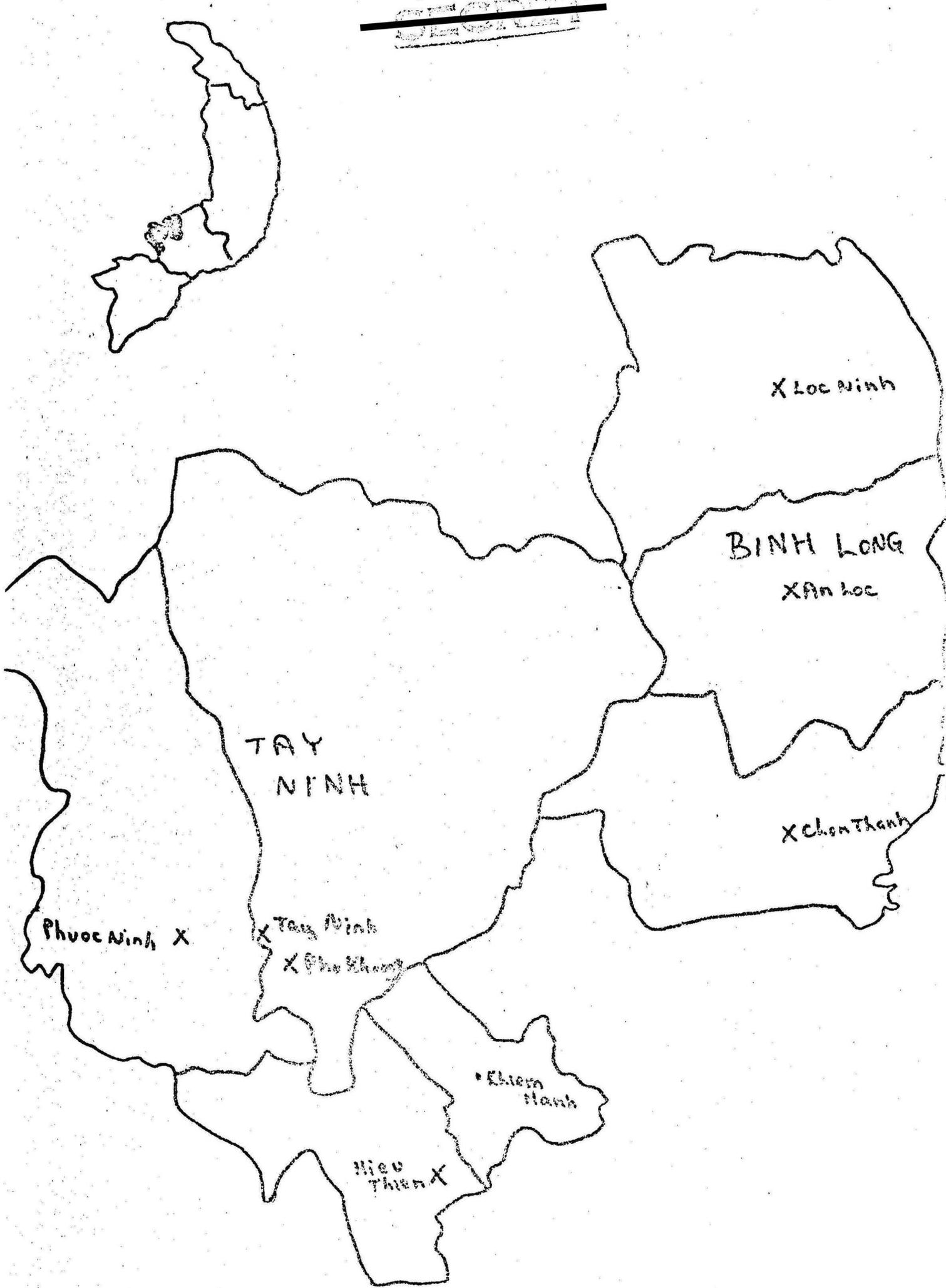
3/0/STY/R32-68 6 February 1968

C. III CORPS

Tet attacks in the ARVN III Corps area, like those in the I Corps area, did not commence until 31 January. This gave Allied commanders an extra day of warning, and enabled them to take precautionary measures which reduced the effectiveness of the enemy assaults.

SEAS for 30 January continued to note the passage of urgent messages by COSVN. Five of these were addressed to Hq, MR 6 on 28 January, and six to the VC 5th Division element in Bien Hoa Province. The 5th Division element sent eleven messages to COSVN that day.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



BINH LONG AND TAY NINH PROVINCES

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BINH DUONG, GIA DINH, HAU NGHIA, LONG AN PROVINCES

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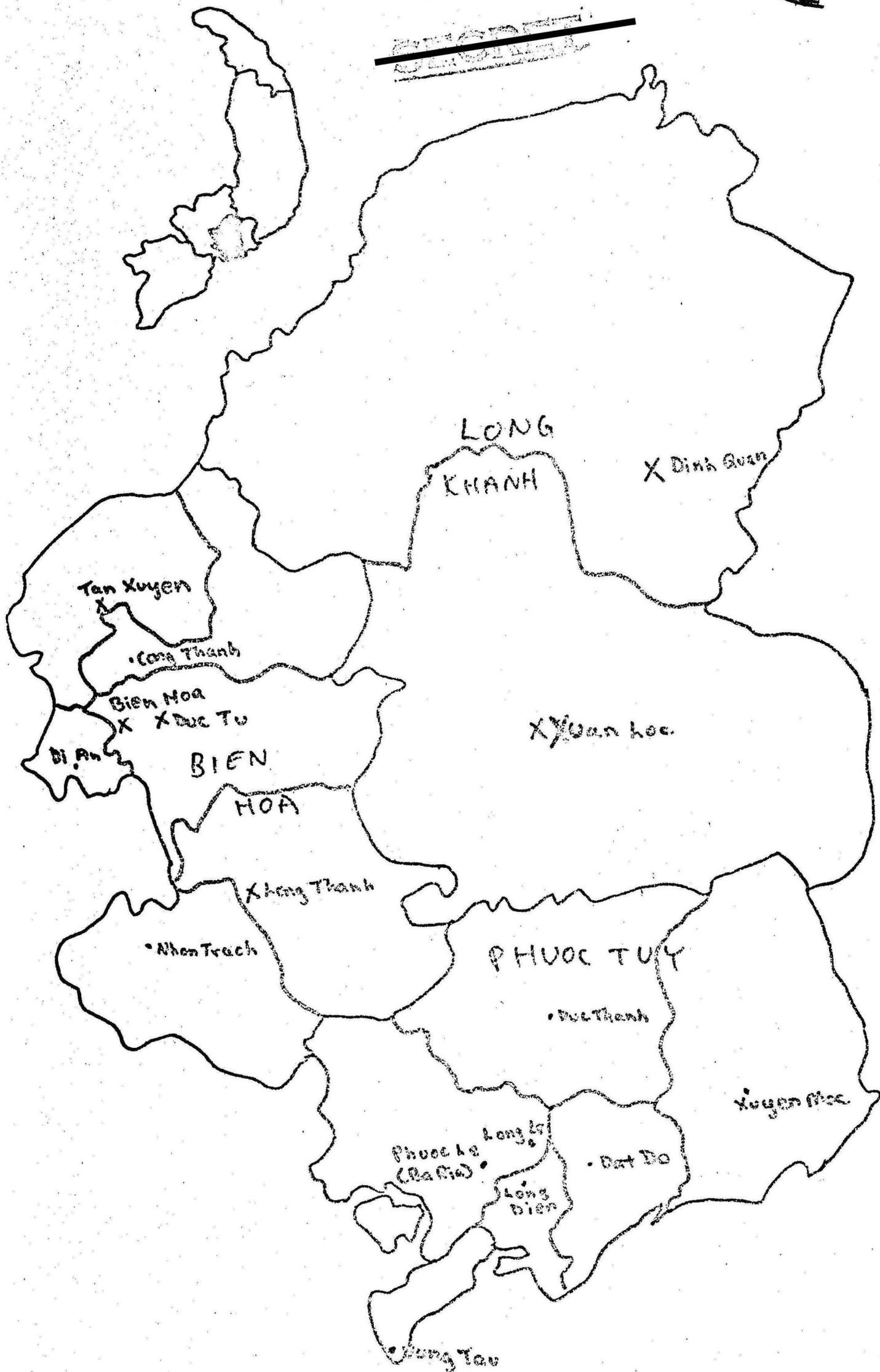
112

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3/O/STY/126-68 30 January 1968

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In the early morning hours of 31 January, Tet attacks commenced in III CTZ. The most significant attacks were directed against Saigon and the Bien Hoa-long Binh complex. In several other provinces, assaults were on a smaller scale, and were carried out principally by local forces. In Tay Ninh Province, collateral holdings indicate that Tay Ninh city and three of the four district capitals were brought under attack by local force companies. In Binh Long, the provincial capital of An Loc and the remaining two district towns, Loc Ninh and Chon Thanh were also assaulted by local force companies. In Phuoc Long Province, local forces attacked Phuoc Binh, the provincial capital, and Song Be. In Long An, local forces attacked Tan An, the provincial capital, and Ben Luc, one of the six district towns. In Hau Nghia, local forces attacked the provincial headquarters, Bai Trai city, and two district towns. In Binh Duong, two district headquarters came under attack. In all of these assaults, no more than a few hundred enemy troops were employed in any one province.



BIEN HOA, LONG KHANH AND PHUOC TUY PROVINCES

SECRET  
Do not disseminate

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The two major attacks, on Saigon and Bien Hoa, also began in the predawn hours of 31 January. Elements of the VC 267th and 269th Battalions and the newly-organized D-16 Local Force Battalion attacked Tan Son Nhut from the north and west. The VC 2nd and 6th LF Battalions entered Cholon from the west, and the C10 Sapper Battalion assaulted the Presidential Palace and the US Embassy. Elsewhere in Gia Dinh Province, Gia Dinh city and two district towns were attacked. Collateral sources indicate that these attacks were conducted by the VC D-12th and D-14th LF Battalions and elements of the 306th LF Battalion, among others.

Concurrent with the attack on Saigon, the VC 5th Division attacked Allied installations in the Bien Hoa area. The VC 274th Regiment attacked Bien Hoa Airbase and the 275th Regiment attacked FFW II Headquarters at Long Binh, just south of Bien Hoa city. Three district capitals in Bien Hoa Province were also attacked. Collateral holdings indicate that the VC Phu Loi LF Battalion; the Dong Nai LF Battalion; and the VC 4th LF Battalion were involved in these attacks.

Fighting in Saigon continued for several days, but on 5 February, ARVN forces began a successful sweep operation while elements of the

115  
US 9th and 25th Division surrounded the city. Although VC elements remained in the Phu Tho racetrack area as late as 21 February, the ARVN sweep eliminated the major enemy units remaining in Saigon.

Prior to the attacks in the Bien Hoa area, SIGINT had reflected a growing concentration of VC 5th Division elements in Bien Hoa during January. As indicated earlier, by 24 January, 5th Division MI elements had shifted their area of interest from Phuoc Long Province to southern Bien Hoa, and during the last several days of the month, 5th Division MI elements and LI elements of HQ, MI 1 reported on that area.

Attacks in the III CTZ continued on 1 and 2 February. On the night of 31 January-1 February, the VC 445th LF Battalion attacked Ba Nua, the capital of Phuoc Tuy Province. Allied losses were 21 KIA and 100 WIA. Civilian casualties were 16 KIA and 34 WIA. The enemy lost 260 killed. On the night of 1-2 February, two enemy battalions attacked the provincial capital of Long Khanh Province, Xuan Loc. Allied casualties were 17 killed and 26 wounded; in addition, 2 civilians were killed and 113 wounded. The enemy attack force lost 66 killed.

In Binh Duong Province SIGINT continued to reflect enemy plans for further action against Allied bases. By late January, several MI

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PHU OC LONG



VC 5th DIVISION COMBAT AND MI ELEMENTS  
IN BIEN HOA AND LONG KHANH PROVINCES, JANUARY, 1968

elements which had been reporting on Allied activity in northeastern 117  
Tay Ninh had commenced reporting on Allied activity in Binh Duong.

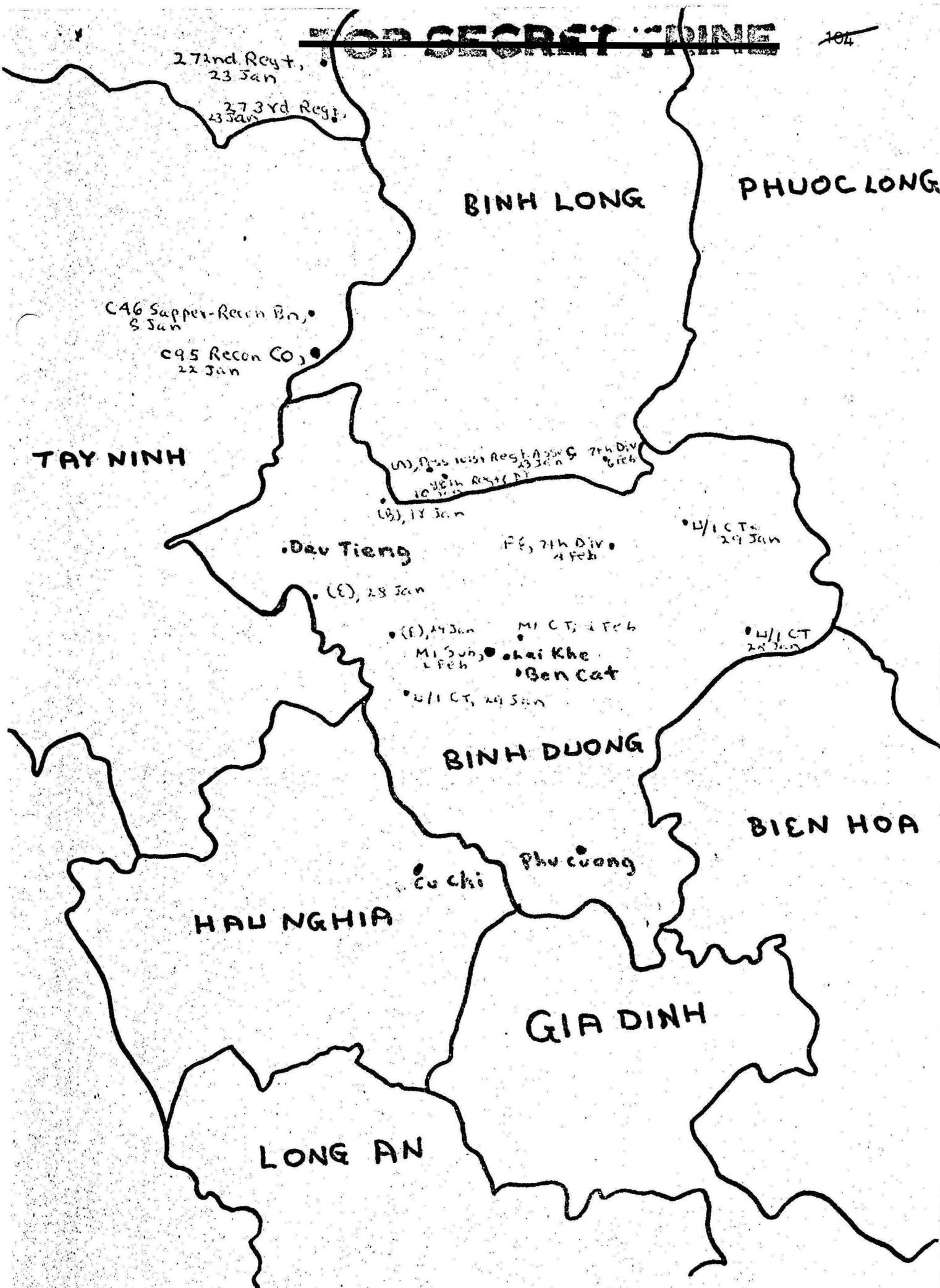
On 30 January, NSA reported that a concentration of enemy elements was developing in the Michelin Plantation area of Binh Dinh Province. The report noted that several major stations were involved. (The referenced designators are keyed to the accompanying map). Many of these had been described earlier, in the 15 January report which had detailed the emergence of several new communications groups in III CTZ. (See P 37-40; map on P 39). Station A, located in the Binh Duong-Binh Long Province border area on 23 January, was the station probably associated with the PAVN 101st Regiment, 7th Division. It communicated with the first major control (CT #1) described in the 15 January report. Station B, located in the same area on 18 January, had communicated with (A) during January. This element was observed on 20 January requesting its control in Tay Ninh Province to relay messages to Hq, B3 Front. Station C moved from northern Tay Ninh to northeastern Binh Duong between 13 and 16 January. This station communicated with an unidentified control in the Binh Duong-Bien Hoa Province area. Station D was believed to be the PAVN 88th Regiment. Between 20 October 1967 and 10 January, this station communicated with an element of the VC 5th Division Hq element.



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~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

~~104~~



ENEMY ELEMENTS IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE AREA  
PRIOR TO ATTACKS ON ALLIED BASES, 3 FEBRUARY 1968

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

119

in Phuoc Long Province. This 5th Division Hq element moved southwards in early January, and ceased communications activity as of 12 January, indicating that it had probably been reunited with its parent headquarters. Station E was an unidentified element which had first appeared in early December 1967. This station communicated with a control authority in Tay Ninh Province. Station F, which communicated with A and C, was referred to as CT #1 in the 15 January report. As of 29 January, this station was located in eastern Binh Duong Province.

The report noted that several MI elements were in the area, including the C95 Reconnaissance Company, subordinate to MIB, 9th Division.

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2/0/VCM/146-68 30 January 1968 CONCENTRATION OF VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST MILITARY UNITS IN THE MICHELIN PLANTATION AREA

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The 31 January SAMS reflected the movement of additional unidentified enemy elements into Binh Duong Province. SAMS for 1 February revealed that on 28 January, COSVN had addressed a message to its subordinate 46th Sapper-Reconnaissance Battalion which expressed interest in Dau Tieng and Phu Quong. The message mentioned the US 3rd Battalion, 22nd Regiment; the 2nd Battalion, 12th Regiment; and a possi-

ble 2nd Battalion, 22nd Artillery Regiment. The SLS noted that the  
 3/22nd and the 2/12th were subordinate to the 3rd Brigade, US 25th  
 Division, headquartered at Dau Tieng. The 2/22nd Artillery Regiment  
 referenced by COSVN, the SLS noted, was probably the A/VN 2/22nd Mech-  
 anized Infantry Regiment, also at Dau Tieng.

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3/0/STY/127-68 31 January 1968; 3/0/STY/128-68 1 February 1968

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On 2 February, NSA reported that military intelligence communi-  
 cations indicated that an enemy attack in the Ben Cat-Lai Khe area had  
 been planned, but had been prevented by the dispatch of armored vehi-  
 cles from Lai Khe. The control element revealed that the present plan  
 was to trap three companies of the US 1st Division, and join PAVN 7th  
 Division elements in "reattacking Ben Cat". The MI control and subor-  
 dinate were both located by AIDF in the immediate Ben Cat-Lai Khe area.

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2/0/VCM/158-68 021724Z February 1968 FOLLOW-UP N. 18 TO 2/0/VCM/R 32-68

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On 1 February, elements of the VC 272nd and 273rd Regiments, VC 9th  
 Division were reportedly engaged just 4 kilometers from Phu Cuong, the  
 provincial capital of Binh Duong. The US 28th Regiment killed over 300  
 of the enemy in this engagement. SIGINT had last identified these

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two regiments in the Tay Ninh-Binh Long-Cambodia border area on 23 January, well north of the 1 February encounter.

On 2 February, 141st Regiment elements attacked the ARVN 1st Battalion, 8th Regiment in Binh Duong Province. On the night of 2-3 February, enemy elements took US base camps at Dau Tieng, Lai Khe, and Cu Chi under fire with .122 mm rockets and 57 mm recoilless rifle fire, but no new significant ground assaults developed in that area.

#### D. IV CORPS

Most attacks in IV CTZ were carried out on the night of 30-31 January, and as in I and II Corps, Allied commanders had a day's warning after the attacks in II CTZ. One of the most devastating attacks was directed against the city of My Tho, the capital of Binh Tuong Province. The attack was carried out by the VC 261st and 263rd LF Battalions; and the VC 514th LF Battalion. On 28 and 29 January, ARDF had fixed the 263rd and 261st Battalions, respectively, in an area more than 30 kilometers from My Tho. In this attack, civilian casualties were extremely heavy. 64 were killed and 600 wounded, and nearly 5,000 civilian homes were burned down. Enemy losses were 434 killed. Cai Be and Cai Lay District

Towns were also attacked in Dinh Tuong. Collateral indicates that the

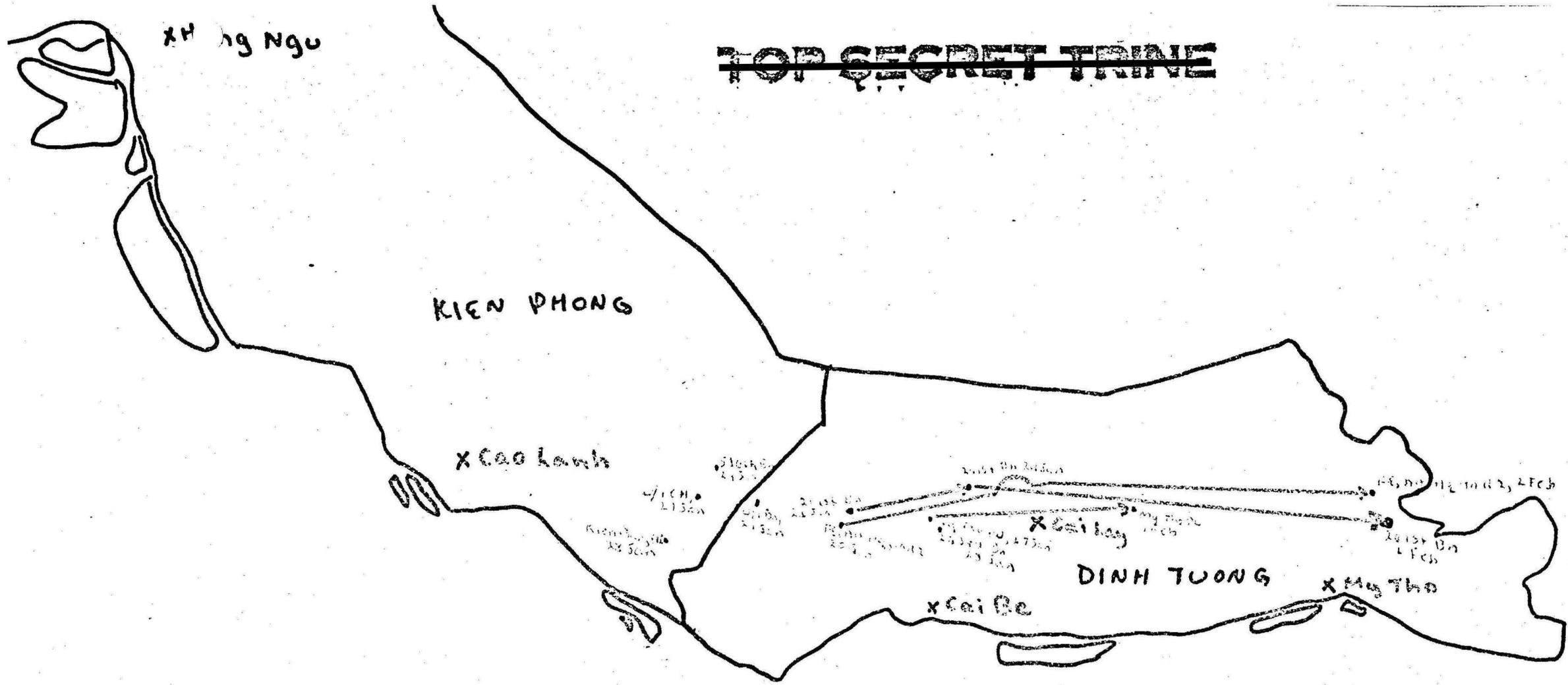
122

DT1 LF Regiment and the VC 207th LF Battalion were involved.

Another major attack was delivered against Ben Tre in Kien Hoa by the VC 518th LF Battalion. Over 150 ARVN soldiers were killed in this assault, and there were 150 civilian casualties as well. Other elements of the 518th Battalion attacked the district towns of Ho Cay and Binh Dai.

In Kien Phong Province, elements of the VC 502nd LF Battalion attacked Cao Lanh and Hong Ngu. In IV CTZ, since few SIGINT resources were available at that time, SIGINT revealed little of the enemy offensive. However, AIDF information was available on several terminals located in Dinh Tuong, Lien Phong and Kien Hoa Provinces, where the major attacks against My Tho, Ben Tre and Cao Lanh took place. AIDF information supplied to consumers in the 27-29 January period revealed a concentration of enemy elements approximately 35 kilometers from My Tho, consisting of the VC 261st and 263rd Battalions, which took part in the attack; the My Tho Provincial Unit; and Forward Element, Alternate Hq, ME 2. AIDF for 1 February noted substantial moves by at least two of these- FE, Alternate Hq, ME 2 and the 261st Battalion- to positions 5-7 kilometers north of My Tho. Apparently, FE, Alternate Hq, ME 2 was established to direct the assault on My Tho.

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~



ENEMY ELEMENTS IN DINH TUONG AND SURROUNDING AREA AT TIME OF MAJOR ATTACKS AGAINST MY THO, BENTRE AND CAOLANH

Elsewhere in IV CTZ, VC Main Force and Local Force battalions con-

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ducted attacks against ARVN provincial and district towns. In Go Cong, elements of the VC 511th Battalion and the 361st LF Battalion attacked Go Cong city. In Vinh Binh, the 501st VC LF Battalion attacked Tra Binh, the provincial capital, while other elements, including the VC 503rd, 505th, and 525th LF Companies, and elements of the VC 509th, 527th and 531st LF Battalions attacked Cang Long and Hieu Can District Towns. In Vinh Long Province, the VC 857th LF and 306th LF Battalions attacked Vinh Long city, and elements of the VC 308th LF Battalion assaulted several district towns. In Chuong Thien, local elements attacked Vi Thanh city. In Ba Nuyen, Soc Trang was assaulted by the D7164 VC LF Battalion, and local elements attacked Ly Nuyen and Thanh Tri. In Bac Lieu, Vinh Loi city was attacked by five LF companies. In Phong Din, the VC Tay Do LF Battalion and the 303rd LF Battalion attacked Can Tho, the provincial capital. The 309th LF Battalion and local elements attacked three district towns. In Kien Giang, Rach Gia was assaulted by elements of the VC U Minh 10 LF Battalion, and other elements of that unit attacked Ha Tien and Kien An. Chau Phu, the provincial capital of Chau Boc, was overrun by the VC 512th LF Battalion, and An Phu and Tri Ton were attacked by the VC 510th and

511th LF Battalions. In An Xuyen, Quan Long city was attacked by the  
VC U Minh 11 LF Battalion, and Cai Noc was assaulted by the New 306th  
VC LF Battalion. In Kien Tuong, the 267th VC LF Battalion attacked

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Moc Hao, and in Sa Dec, LF companies assaulted Sa Dec city, Duc Ton, and Duc Thanh.

By the end of the first few days of February, the Tet Offensive was largely over, although fierce fighting continued in Hue, and mop-up action in Saigon, Ban Me Thuot, and other areas. However, exclusive of the continuing action in those areas, new attacks delivered after the first few days in February cannot be considered part of the Tet Offensive. During the first few days of February, SIGINT revealed numerous enemy plans to follow up the Tet attacks with new assaults, primarily by key units which had not been committed in the first wave. As noted, in some cases, these attacks were delivered, such as the attack on Dak To and Tan Canh by 174th Regiment elements and the firefight between 272nd and 273rd Regiment elements and the US 28th Regiment near Phu Cuong. However, apparently, the enemy did not feel that conditions warranted the commitment of his forces against major Allied base camps, and most of these attack plans were aborted. However, enemy units remained poised for attack, through much of February, ready to take advantage of any opportunities caused by the disruption wreaked by the Tet Offensive.

A. Mt 5

1. B3 FRONT AREA

During the first several days of February, B3 Front elements continued to express extreme interest in Allied positions in the area, as they sought an opportunity to follow up their Tet attacks. There were strong indications that a new phase of tactical activity was scheduled for implementation in early February. On 1 February, NSM warned of another phase of the enemy offensive, possibly scheduled to commence on 3 February. The report recalled an 8 January message between two unidentified enemy elements which had referred to "N Plus 4" activities, and a late January message passed by the PAVN 1st Division Hq element which had referenced a plan scheduled to begin no later than 28 January and end no later than 2 February.

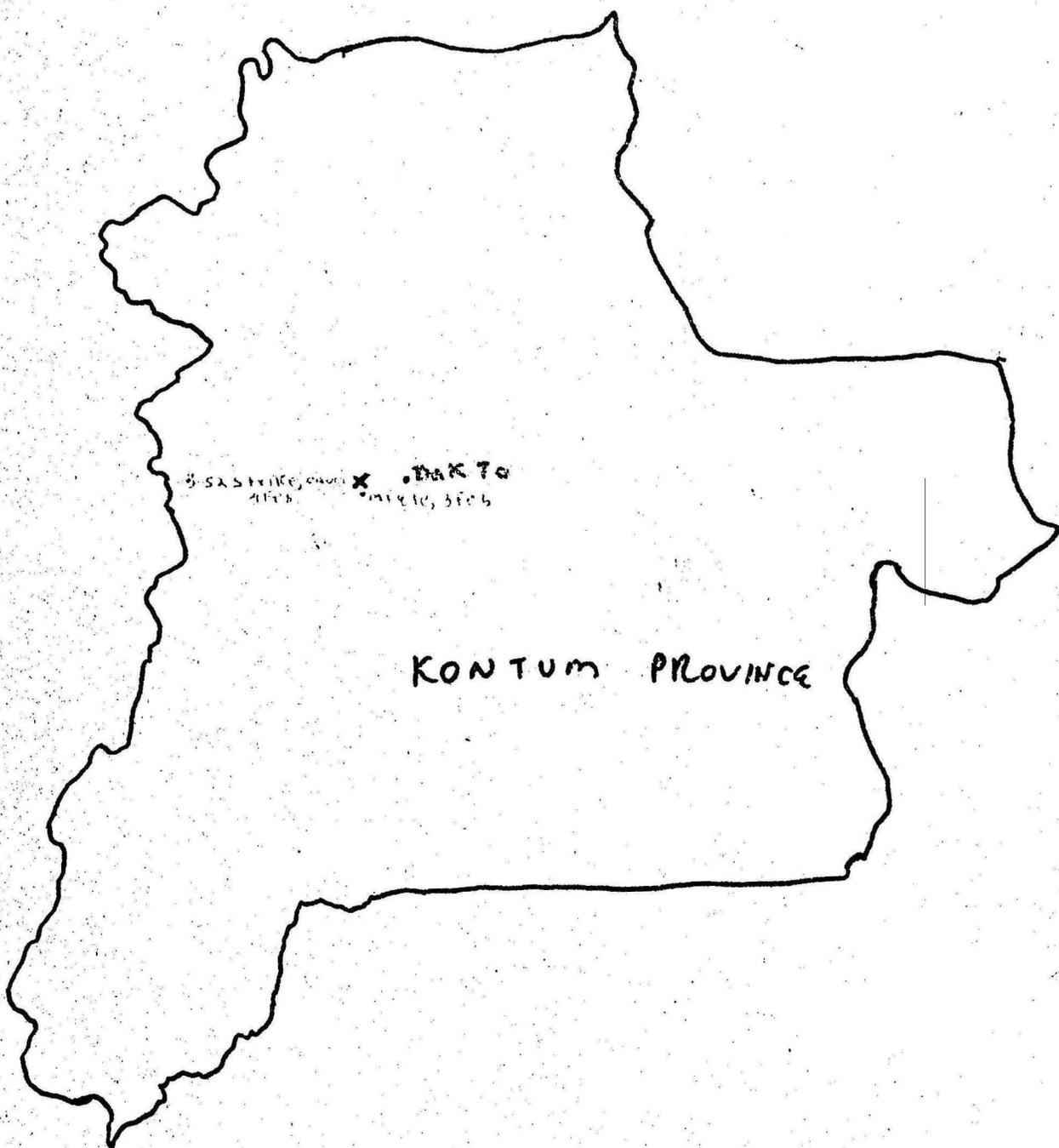
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2/0/VCM/R55-68 012117 February 1968 FOLLOW-UP REF 16 TO 2/0/VCM/T32-68

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SEAS for 4 February reflected continued enemy interest in the Dak To-Can Tanh area. A newly-activated subordinate of the MIB, 1st Division, located in the Dak To area, continued to report extensively on Allied convoy activity in the Tan Canh area.

~~TOP SECRET~~



MI ELEMENT SUPPORTING PAVN ACTIVITY NEAR  
DAK TO DAMAGED BY B-52 STRIKE, 4 FEBRUAN

SEAS for 6 February revealed that on 5 February, this MI element had reported to MIB, 1st Division that it had been hit by a B-52 strike on 4 February. The element reported that it had suffered three killed,

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and that its bunkers had collapsed.

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3/O/STY/130-68 4 February 1968 3/O/STY/132-68 6 February 1968

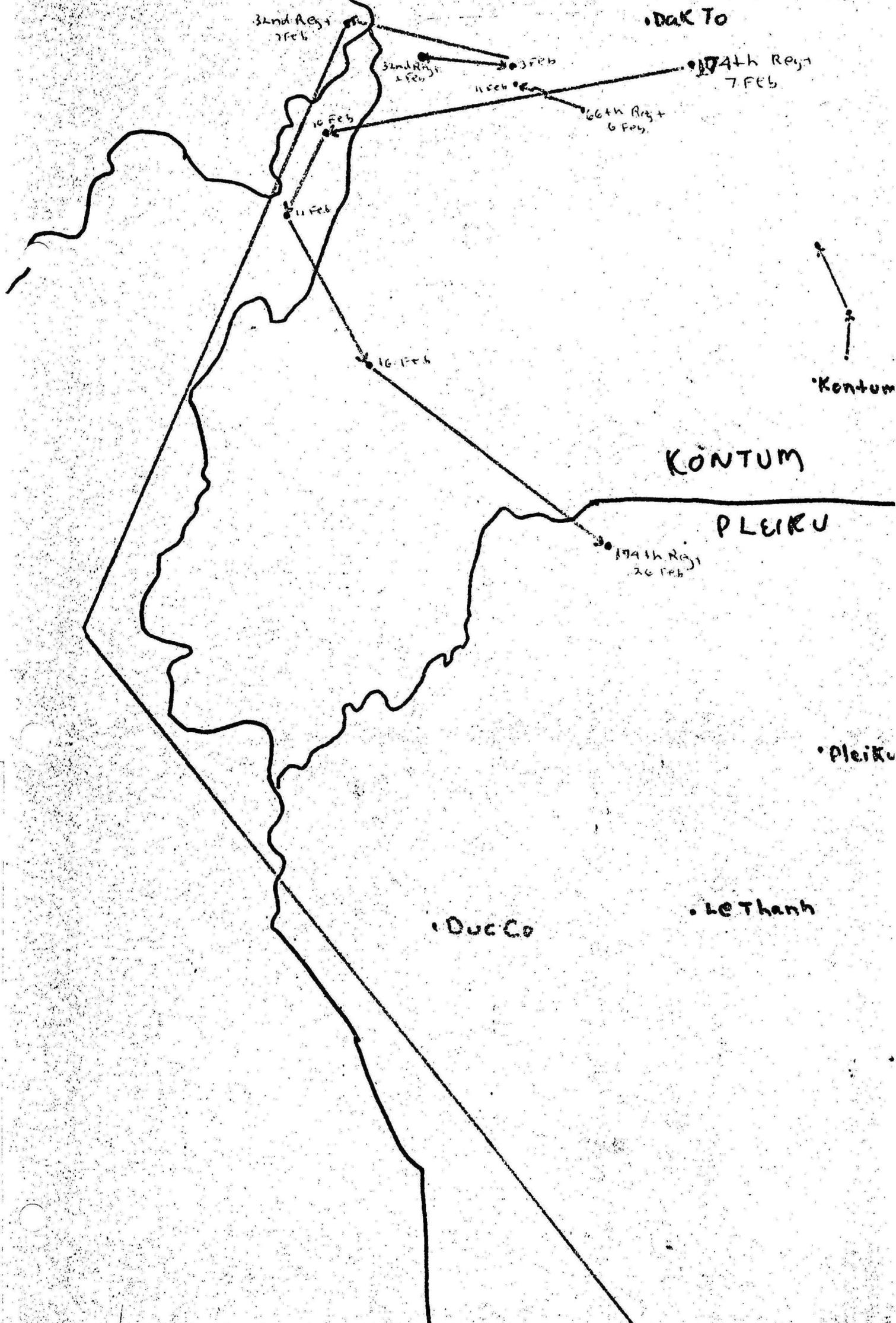
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During the next several days, major B3 front combat elements remained near key targets in the area. The 32nd, 66th and 174th Regiments were near Dak To; the 24th Regiment was near Kontum; the 95B Regiment and other elements were close to Pleiku city; and the Jarlac Provincial Unit; elements of the 33rd Regiment; and a B3 Front Hq element were threatening Ban Me Thuot. During this period, SIGINT product continued to reference enemy plans to shell Allied positions, notably Dak To and Le Thanh. The major engagement of this period was the attack on the ARVN 42nd Regiment in western Kontum by enemy elements believed to be the 2nd Battalion, 174th Regiment. Enemy forces lost 150 dead in this action.

ARDF information soon began to reflect the movement of major B3 Front elements away from their operating areas near key Allied targets.

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

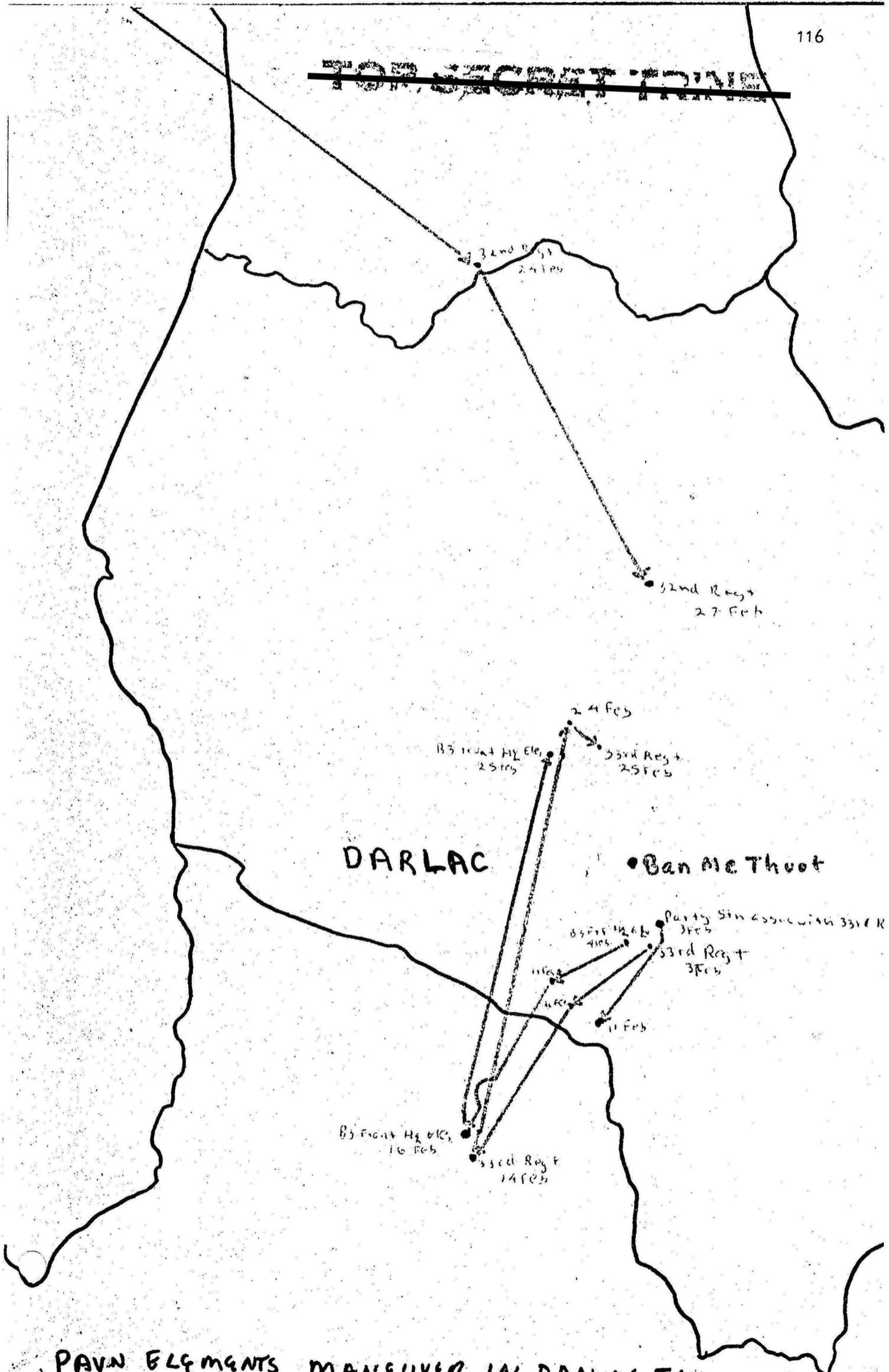
115



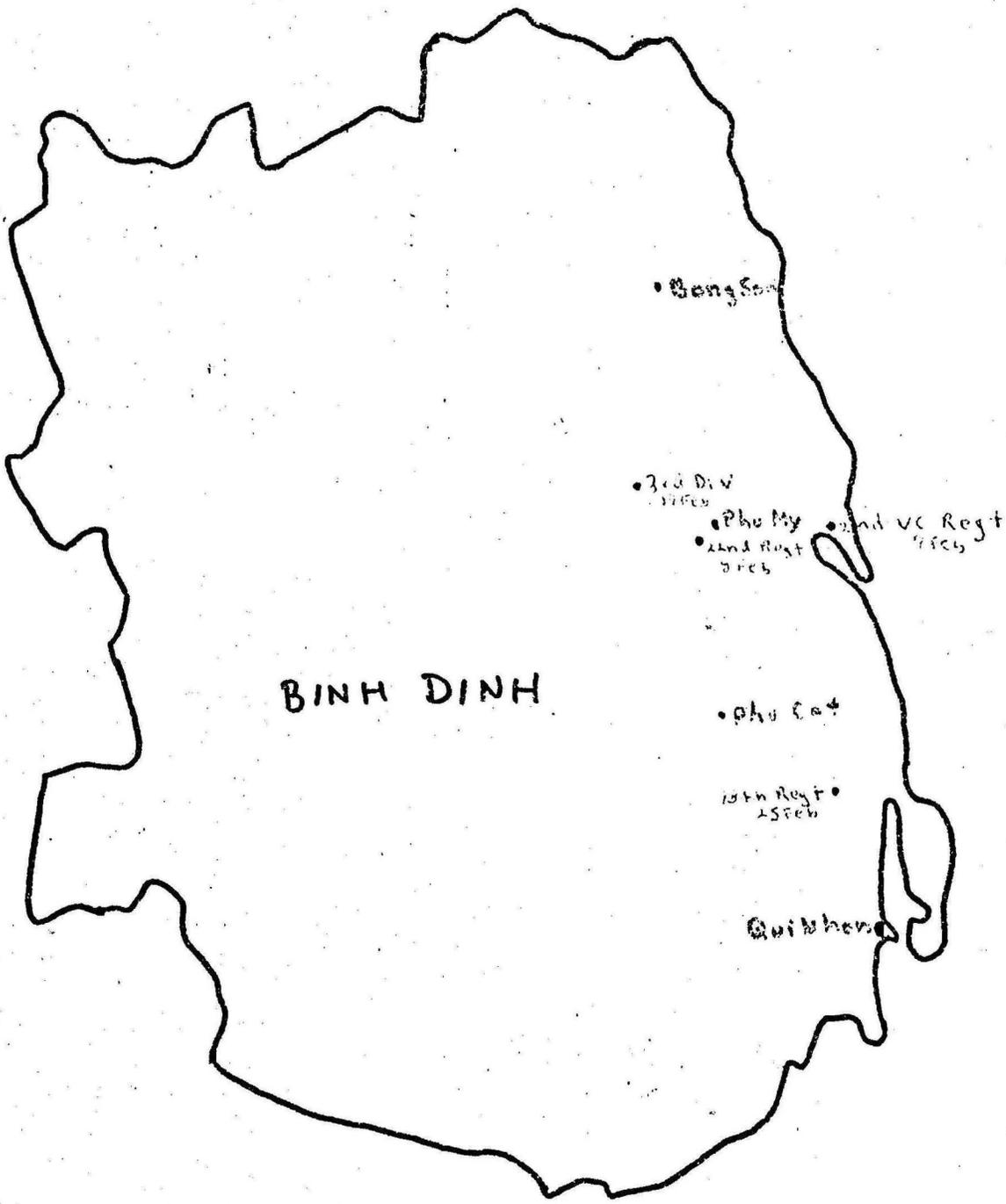
PAVN ELEMENTS RELOCATE, FEBRUARY 1968

The 24th Regiment moved north, away from Kontum city, and by the second week in February, both the 174th and 32nd Regiments had relocated away from the Pak To area and into Cambodia. Both units continued their repositioning. ADF information on the 174th Regiment placed that unit in northern Pleiku Province by late February, while the 32nd Regiment moved through Cambodia into southern Pleiku, and then into Darlac Province in late February. Similarly, other PAVN elements moved away from Ban He Thuot following their ejection from the city.

Although enemy elements continued to threaten Allied positions, activity in the Kontum-Pleiku Province area was primarily confined to fire attacks, which increased steadily, and to the ambushing of convoys. In Darlac Province, however, another threat to Ban He Thuot developed in late February and early March, as the 32nd Regiment relocated into Darlac, and the 33rd Regiment, in conjunction with the B3 Front Hq element, turned toward Ban He Thuot again in late February. Prior to that period, the 33rd Regiment, the B3 Front Hq element, and the Party terminal associated with the PAVN 33rd Regiment had moved well southwest of Ban He Thuot in mid-February, but had moved north-northeast to an area northeast of the city by late February, prepara-



PAVN ELEMENTS MANEUVER IN BAN ME THUOT AREA, FEBRUARY 1968



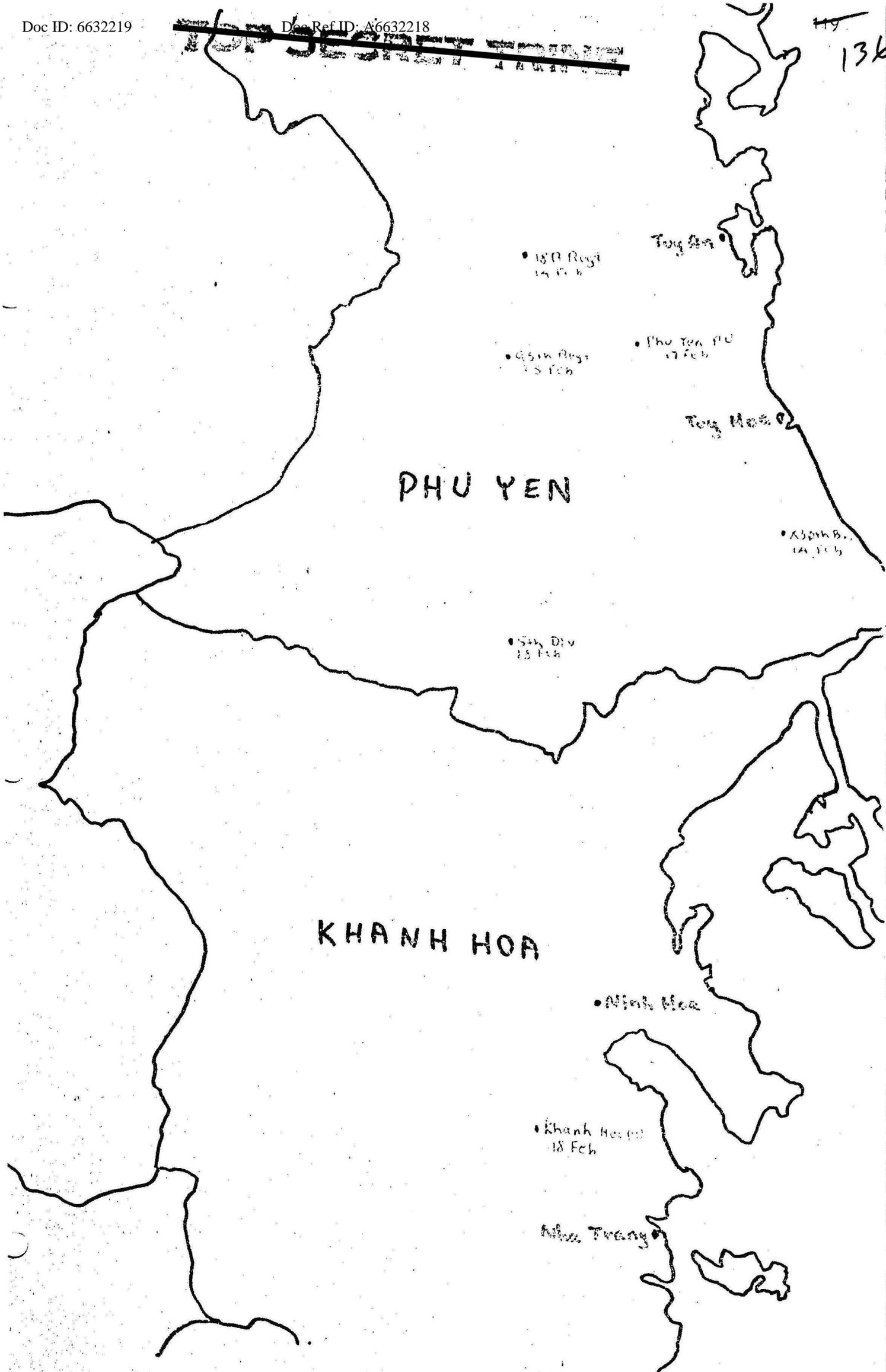
3RD DIVISION DISPOSITIONS, FEBRUARY, 1968

tory to a series of small scale attacks delivered against the city in early March. 135

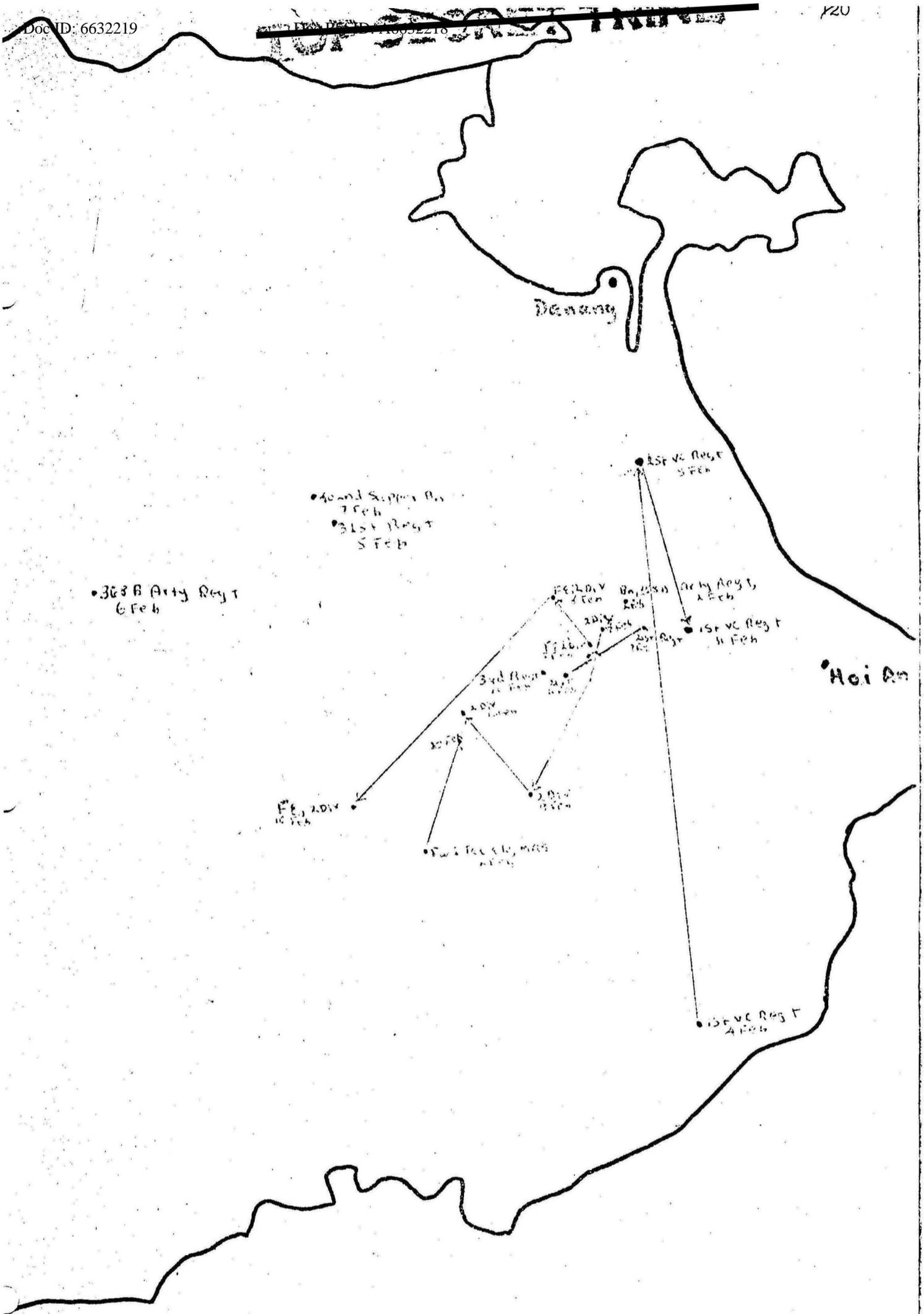
## 2. PAVN 2ND, 3RD AND 5TH DIVISIONS

In the PAVN 3rd Division area in Binh Dinh Province, enemy units were quiet during the weeks immediately following the Tet attacks. Major combat elements remained relatively stationary through mid-February, and there were frequent reflections of bombardment and Allied tactical pressure. The most notable engagement was the 7 February attack on an ARVN outpost 9 kilometers north of Qui Nhon by the 8th Battalion, 18th Regiment. 74 of the enemy, including the battalion commander, were killed in this battle.

The combat elements subordinate to the Southern Front/PAVN 5th Division were also relatively inactive through much of February, as they attempted to regroup and build back to strength. The 95th and 183 Regiments were in central Phu Yen Province; the X30th ARVN Battalion was along the Phu Yen coast, south of Tuy Hoa; and Hq, 5th Division was in the Phu Yen-Khanh Hoa Province border area. The 183 Regiment had returned to its base area in Phu Yen by 5 February, after conducting attacks against Nha Trang and Ninh Hoa during Tet. However, by early March, the 183 Regiment had again moved into Khanh Hoa Province,



SOUTHERN FRONT /5TH DIVISION DISPOSITIONS, FEBRUARY, 1968



2ND DIVISION MOVEMENTS IN VICINITY OF HOIAN AND DANANG, FEBRUARY 1968

to a position approximately 30 kilometers southwest of Minh Hoa and 30 kilometers northwest of Nha Trang.

Following their Tet attacks, PAVN 2nd Division elements remained in attack positions in Quang Nam Province until mid-February. The 21st Regiment returned to Quang Nam Province from Quang Tin, where it had joined in the attack on Tam Ky during Tet. The 9 February SEMS warned of a substantial concentration of enemy elements in the Panang-Hoi An area of eastern Quang Nam, including Hq, 2nd Division and its Forward Element; all three regimental subordinates of the division- the 1st VC and the PAVN 3rd and 21st Regiments; the PAVN 368B Artillery Regiment and its 2nd Battalion; the Forward Tactical Element, Hq, 31st Regiment; and the 402nd Sapper Battalion.

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3/0/STY/135-68 9 February 1968

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On 8 and 9 February, tactical activity in Quang Nam Province flared up momentarily. On 8 February, the 3rd Battalion, 31st Regiment attacked a Combined Action Platoon in central Quang Nam Province, inflicting casualties of 15 killed and 57 wounded on the Allied force. The 3/31st Regiment lost 150 killed in this clash. On 9 February, 2nd Division combat elements lost nearly 200 killed near Hoi An in a

firefight with the US 1st Battalion, 35th Regiment on WHEELER/WALLOWA.

In addition, 30 members of the PAVN 31st Regiment were killed 8 kilometers south of Danang.

Following these clashes, enemy elements in Quang Nam Province concentrated on evading Allied forces, and Communist communications reflected continued harassment from bombardment and tactical pressure.

The SAMS for 14 February revealed that captured documents had confirmed the SIGINT identification of Forward Element, 2nd Division and the 1st VC and 3rd and 21st PAVN Regiments. In addition, the SAMS noted that a communications terminal active since June 1967 had been identified as the 401st Sapper Regiment, in Quang Ngai Province.

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3/0/SIX/139-68 14 February 1968

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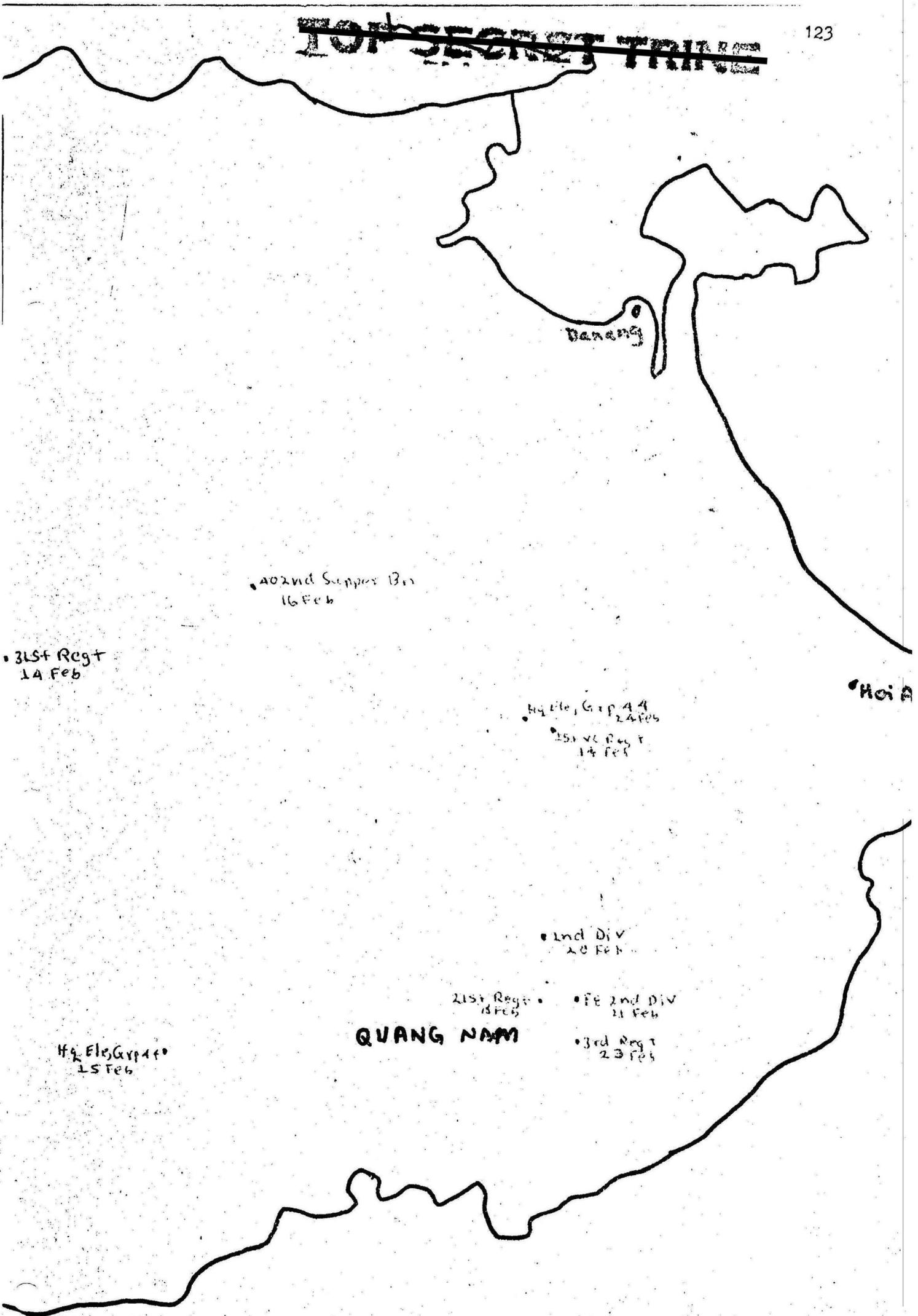
According to collateral, this regiment had been organized in January 1968, and had taken part in the 31 January attack on Quang Ngai city.

On 15 February, the SAMS noted that the 31st Regiment, which had relocated from North Vietnam by December 1967, and then terminated its



~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

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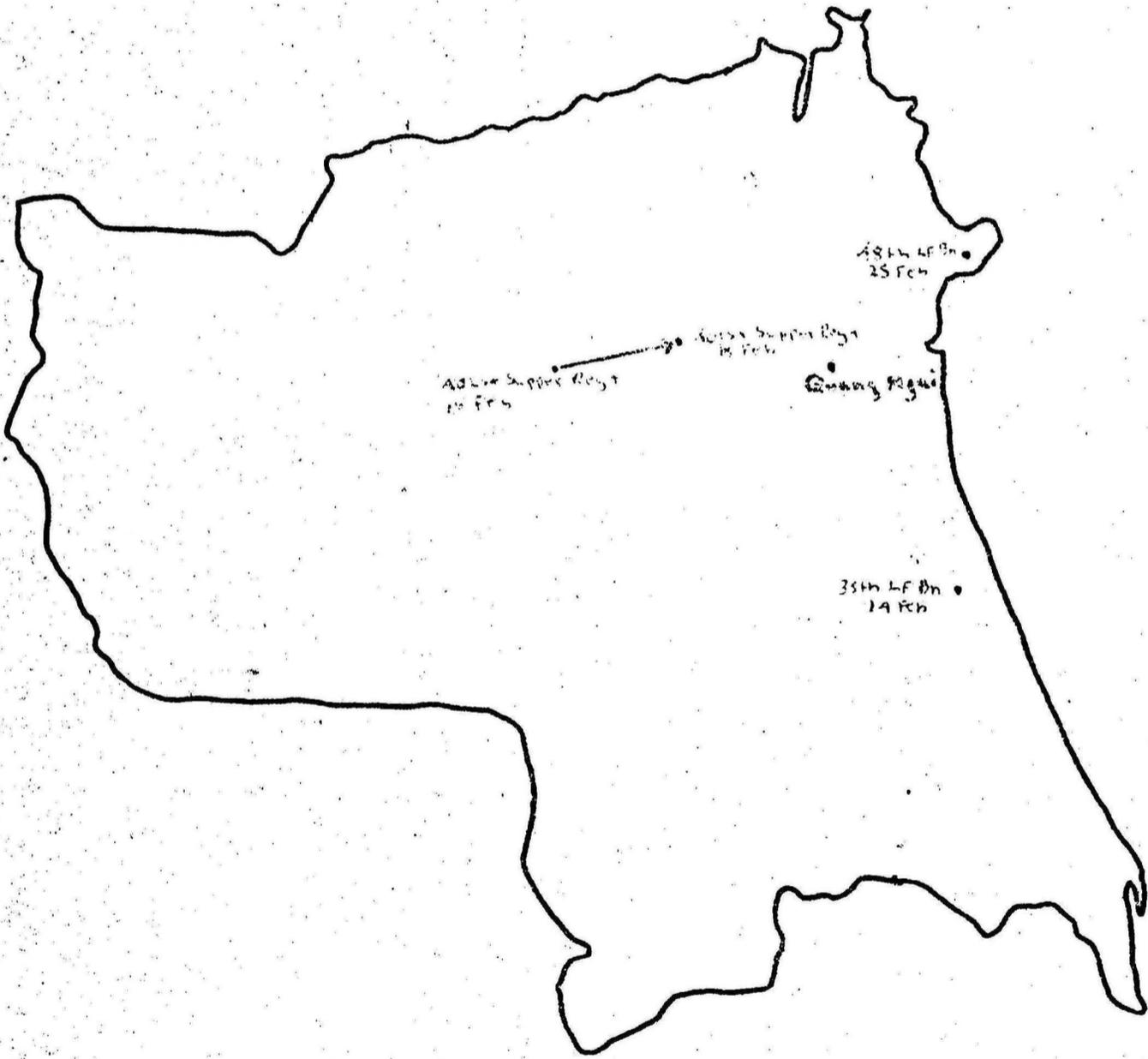


2ND DIVISION AND GROUP 44 DISPOSITIONS, MID-FEBRUARY, 1968

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

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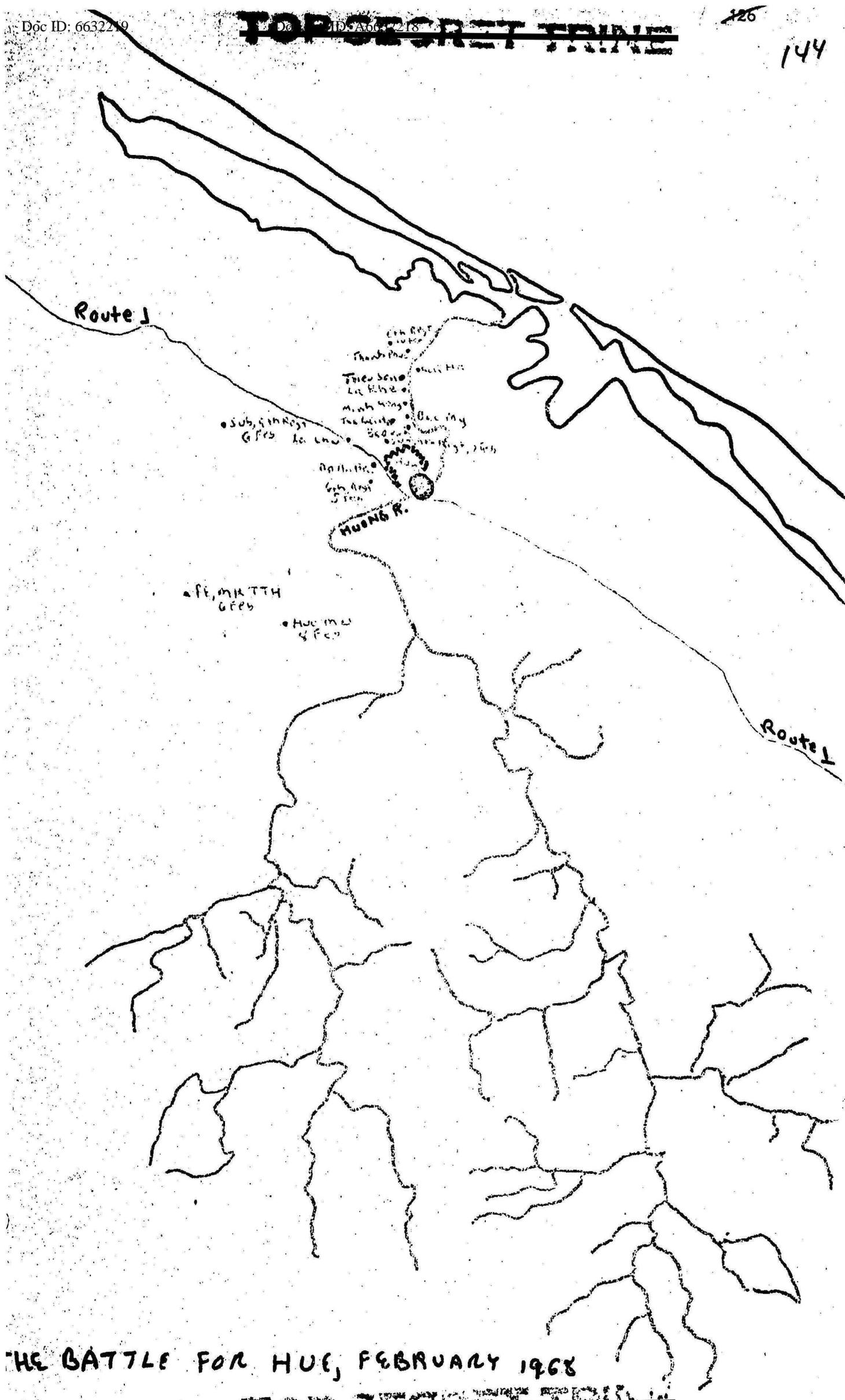
PAVN DISPOSITIONS IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE, FEBRUARY, 1968

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

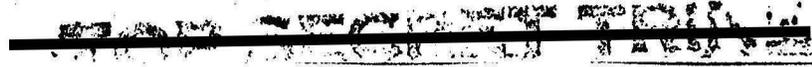
B. IR TTH (QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN)

SIGINT support in the IR TTH area during the period following the TET attacks centered around the continuing battle in Hue. In early February, US Marines and AAVF elements drove the enemy out of the city, proper, and began the painfully slow process of digging them out of their positions in the Citadel. AAF results reflected the movement of major enemy administrative elements away from the immediate vicinity of Hue in early February, and indicated the presence of PAVN 6th, 9th and 29th Regiment elements in the area. Tactical messages provided considerable insight into enemy intentions.

The 8 February SERS noted that a 10th Company was in Ninh Huong (see accompanying map). An 11th Company was to attempt to cross the Huong (Perfume) river to Lai Ha. Other tactical messages carried requests for B-40 rocket launchers to use against Allied boats on the river. The 10th Company also noted strong Allied reaction to enemy attempts to advance fresh troops into Hue. The SERS identified the 10th Company as possibly subordinate to a battalion of the PAVN 6th Regiment; a thorough review of message activity some weeks later indicated that this battalion was actually the 9th Battalion, 29th Regiment.



THE BATTLE FOR HUE, FEBRUARY 1968



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3/0/STY/134-68 18 February 1968

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Enemy tactical messages evinced great concern over Allied boat traffic on the river, for it was one of the chief supply routes for Allied forces attempting to dislodge Communist troops from the Citadel. During the second week in February, elements of the 9th Battalion, 29th Regiment clustered in areas along the banks of the Huong River north of Hue, and attempted to hinder Allied resupply and reinforcement efforts. Communist gunners sank a number of Allied boats during the battle in Hue, hampering Allied resupply efforts to some extent.

The 9 February SMS revealed that the 10th Company had reported combat with Allied troops and vessels in a 7 February message. The company reported that it had been unable to organize attacks against Allied elements at La Khe or Bao My as yet. A later message ordered the 10th Company to attack, and halt Allied reinforcements. On 9 February, the 10th Company reported that one of its platoons was at Bao Vinh, one at Minh Huong and one at Trieu Son.

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3/0/STY/r35-68 9 February 1968

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and the targets of its aborted attacks line the Huong River, and provide opportunity for an occupying force to dominate river traffic.

Enemy rockets fired from these positions were quite effective against Allied boats.

The 11 February SAs noted that the 10th Company had reported that it had been unable to cross the river at La Khe because the people had fled, and there was no cover. The 11th Company, at the Lai Ha, was ordered to block Allied elements moving up from Bao Vinh, and prevent resupply of Hue by boat. The SAs also noted that enemy elements now employing the tactical signal plan adopted in late January by many enemy radio terminals in the MR TTH area included the Forward Element, Hq, MR TTH; the possible Hue Municipal Unit; a battalion of the PAVN 6th Regiment; and an unidentified authority believed to be the PAVN 9th Regiment. The suspected PAVN 9th Regiment was in the Quang Tri city area; the remaining enemy elements using the new tactical signal plan were near Hue.

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3/0/STY/A36-69 11 February 1968

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ARDF on the PAVN 6th Regiment and on an unidentified element of the PAVN 9th Regiment on 6 and 7 February placed these elements in the immediate vicinity of Hue, while the Forward Element, Hq NBTTH; the Hue Municipal Unit; and another 9th Regiment element were located in close proximity to the city during the 6-8 February period.

The 12 February SLEAS revealed that the 10th Company had reported sinking an American boat on 11 February. On 12 February, the 10th Company was ordered to organize a rocket launcher platoon to fire on Allied vessels on the river.

SLEAS for 14 February reported that the unidentified battalion of the PAVN 6th Regiment ((later identified as 9th Battalion, 29th Regiment)) had ordered all companies to withdraw to An Hoa as soon as possible. At An Hoa, they would be met, and guided to an unspecified assembly area. However, the B-40 rocket teams were to position themselves at Thanh Phuoc, and fire on Allied vessels. The 10th Company was directed to ignore these orders, and await further instructions.

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3/O/STY/137-68 12 February 1968; 3/O/STY/138-68 14 February 1968

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The 15 February SLEAS reported tactical activity in the An Hoa area, west of the Citadel, involving the 9th Company. In a 14 February

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message, the 10th Company reported that it had crossed Route 1. Presumably, the 10th Company was the last company of the 9th Battalion, 29th Regiment to relocate from its positions north of Hue to the An Hoa area.

SEAS for 16 February detailed a 15 February message which ordered two regimental transport companies to bring down ammunition that night. Between 50 and 100 rounds of .82 mm mortar ammunition was to be dropped off at La Chu, the possible location of an unidentified 8th Battalion.

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3/0/STY/140-68 15 February 1968; 3/0/STY/141-68 16 February 1968

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By this time, the battle for control of Hue had long since been decided, and Allied forces were attempting to clear the few remaining enemy troops from their entrenchments within the Citadel. Tactical communications serving the 9th Battalion, PAVN 29th Regiment ceased as of 17 February, and on 20 February, Hq, PAVN 6th Regiment was identified well north of Hue. On 25 February, the last remaining enemy elements withdrew from Hue, ending the battle.

On 26 February, the SEAS reidentified the tactical communications previously believed to be serving the PAVN 6th Regiment as serving the PAVN 29th Regiment. The battalion designators 7 and [redacted] had been observed;

these <sup>here</sup> are 29th Regiment battalion designators, not 6th Regiment designators. In addition, several personalities associated with the 29th Regiment had been observed.

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3/0/STY/149-68 26 February 1968

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Originally, one of the earliest tactical messages passed on this facility had borne the signature of a 6th Regiment staff member, and the elements passing these messages had been tentatively identified as subordinate to the 6th Regiment on that basis. However, references to the 7th and 9th Battalions, and the observance of personalities previously associated with the 29th Regiment soon indicated that enemy elements which had operated along the Huong River during the second week in February were actually subordinate to the 9th Battalion, 29th Regiment. As noted earlier, there were also references to an 8th Battalion in the La Chu area, as well. This designation is problematical; the 8th Battalion, 29th Regiment was believed to be operating in the Khe Sanh area at that time. Yet, no other regiment in the Hue area had an 8th Battalion.

SIGINT thus indicated that the 29th Regiment bore the brunt of the continuing battle for Hue in February, with the 9th Battalion

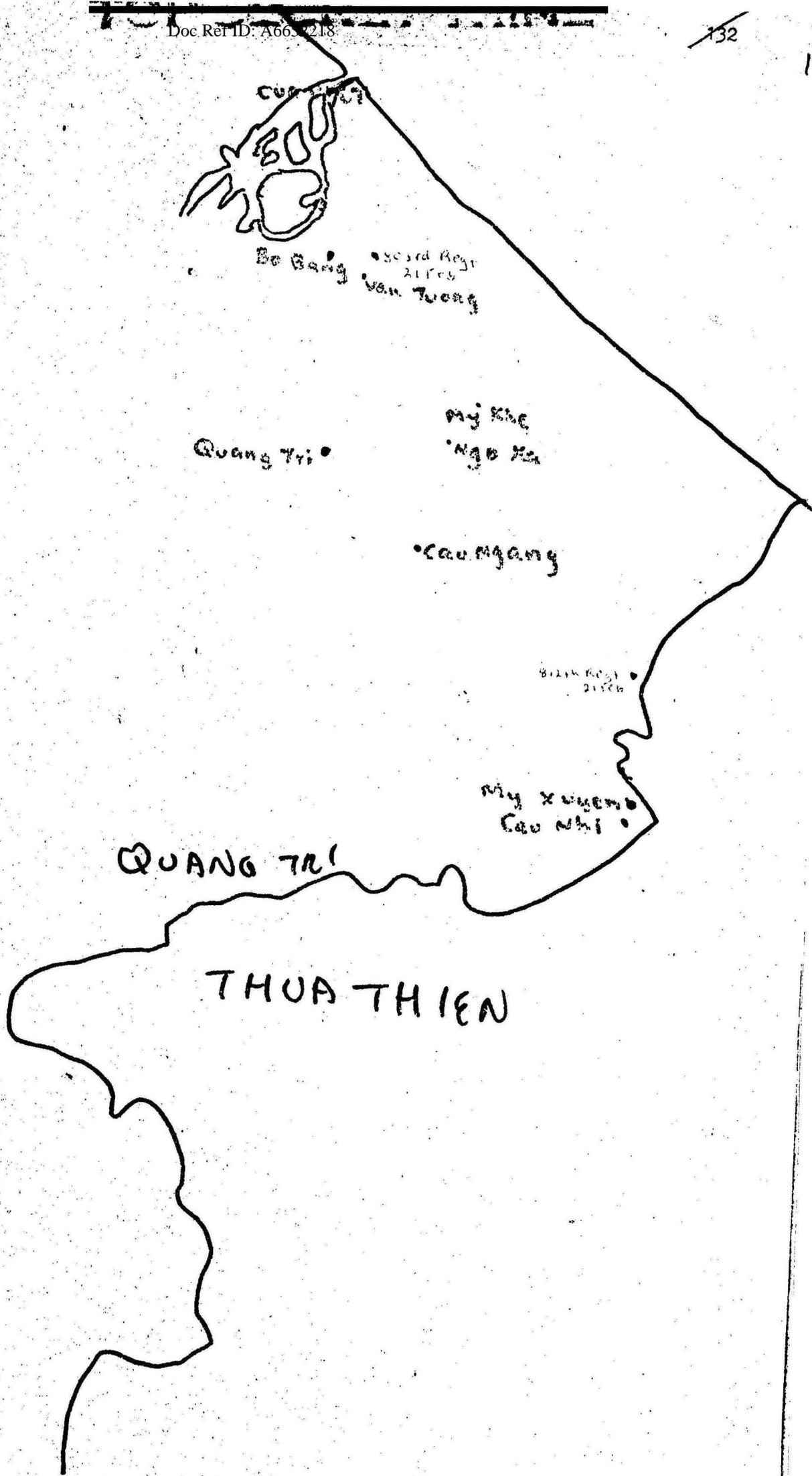
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being particularly heavily involved. Indications are that 6th Regiment elements remained in the area during February, but were apparently not as heavily engaged.

Toward the end of the battle for Hue, PAVN elements again developed a potential threat to Quang Tri city. The 16 February SENS revealed that both 803rd and 812th Regiment elements were reconnoitering the area. The 1st Battalion, 803rd Regiment and the 4th Battalion, 812th Regiment were both active in the vicinity of My Khe (see accompanying map), approximately 7 kilometers northeast of Quang Tri.

The 18 February SENS noted that both 803rd and 812th Regiment messages were referencing Ngo Ba, immediately southwest of My Khe. The 1st Battalion, 803rd Regiment revealed plans to attack an Allied company if it remained in My Khe overnight. On 16 February, an 803rd Regiment element reported that an Allied force of 321 men and 10 tanks was in the Bo Bang area, approximately 10 kilometers north of Quang Tri.

On 20 February, the SENS noted evidence of combat activity in the Quang Tri city area on 16 and 17 February. The 4th Battalion, 812th Regiment reported that its 16th Company had attacked Hai Vinh, and an unidentified 803rd Regiment element reported that wounded were to be



303RD AND 812TH REGIMENT ELEMENTS NEAR QUANG TRI CITY, FEBRUARY 1968

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3/0/STY/142-68 18 February 1968; 3/0/STY/144-68 20 February 1968

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A:DF on the PAVI 803rd and 812th regiments on 21 February placed the 803rd regiment in the Bo Bang-Van Tuong area, well north of Quang Tri city, while the 812th regiment was located on the Quang Tri-Thua Thien Province border, well southeast of the city. This was the area the 812th regiment had entered in January, following its relocation from the immediate DMZ area. The 25 February SEAS noted that the 803rd regiment had been attempting to interdict Allied boat traffic on the Cua Viet Channel during the past few days, while the 6th Battalion, 812th regiment was countersweeping near Cau Khi and My Xuyen in the Quang Tri-Thua Thien Province border area, approximately 20 kilometers from Quang Tri city. Although an attack against Cau Ngang, approximately 8 kilometers southeast of Quang Tri city was being considered, the immediate threat to the city was over.

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3/0/STY/148-68 25 February 1968

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VC 5TH DIVISION ACTIVE IN BIEN HOA AREA, FEBRUARY, 1968

Following their Tet attacks on Bien Hoa Air Base and Long Binh, VC 5th Division elements remained poised for further aggressive action in the Bien Hoa area. In the first week of February, there were strong indications that further attacks on Bien Hoa were contemplated. On 4 February, NSA reported that 5th Division elements were discussing an imminent VC artillery attack on Bien Hoa Airbase in messages passed on 3 February.

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2/O/VCM/163-68 040109Z February 1968 FOLLOW-UP NO 23 TO 2/O/VCM/132-68

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The 6 February S.M.S noted that the 5th Division elements which had discussed the shelling of Bien Hoa on 3 February had not been heard since 1632 hours local time on that date. The S.M.S also revealed that the VC 274th Regiment had resumed communications activity with the 2nd Battalion as of 5 February, after being unobserved in radio communications with any of its subordinates since 25 September 1967.

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3/O/STY/132-68 6 February 1968

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Several days later, 5th Division elements again began to manifest an attack posture. The 12 February SEAS disclosed that a subordinate of the Military Intelligence Section (MIS), VC 5th Division was now in Bien Hoa Province. This subordinate had resumed communications with its parent headquarters in late December, after three months of inactivity. Its last known location was in Vinh Tuy Province, at that time.

The 16 February SEAS revealed that the VC 5th Division and its two subordinate regiments remained in Bien Hoa Province, in the general vicinity of Bien Hoa Airbase. The 275th Regiment had resumed communications with Military Affairs Section, COSVII for the first time since October 1966.

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3/O/STY/1037-68 12 February 1968; 3/O/STY/1141-68 16 February 1968

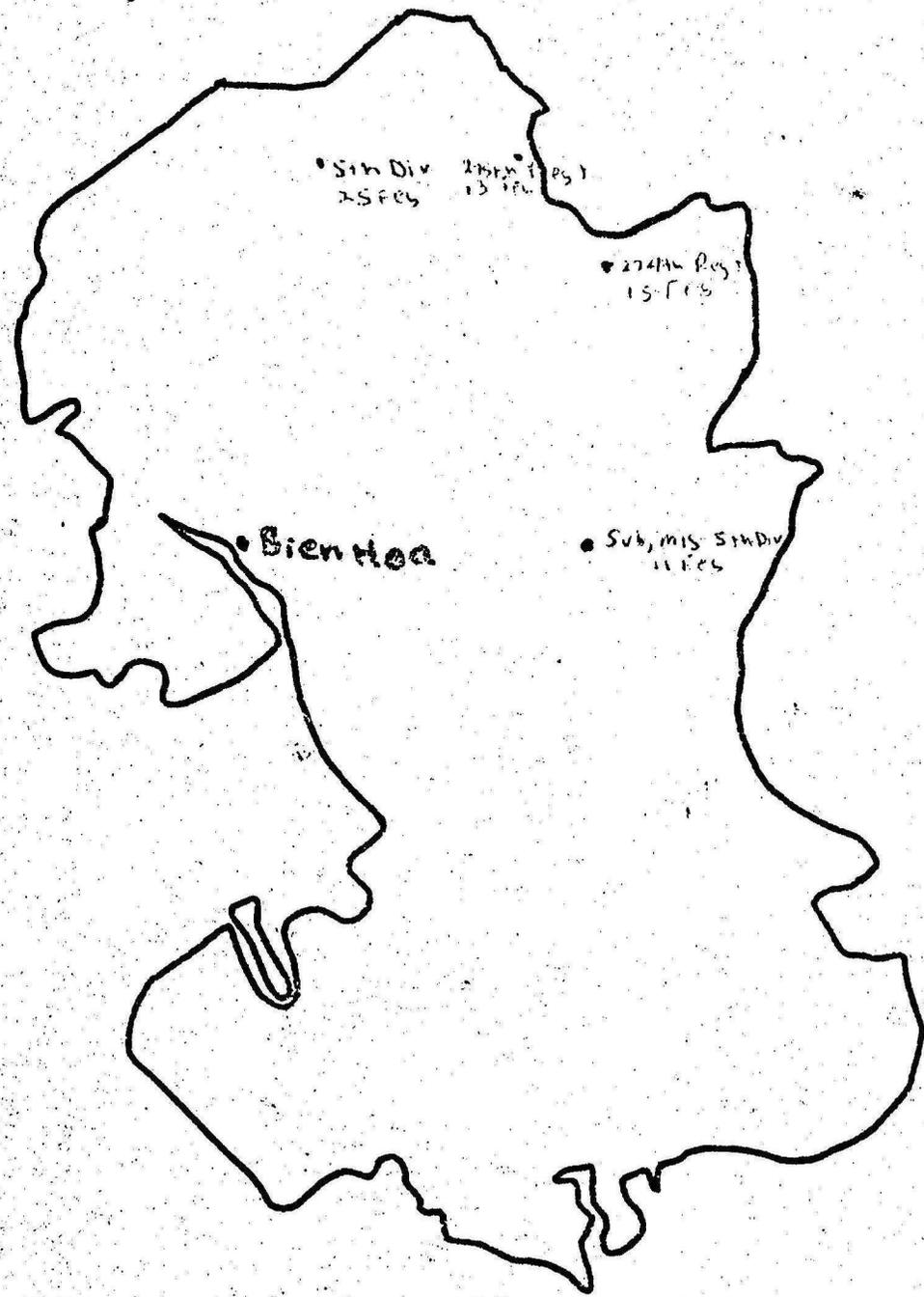
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During the latter part of February, 5th Division elements continued to maneuver in Bien Hoa Province, preparatory to a series of fire attacks conducted against Bien Hoa Airbase in March. As in the western highlands of III 5, enemy elements concentrated on conducting fire attacks, and avoided major ground action when possible.

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~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~



5th DIVISION DISPOSITIONS, FEBRUARY 19

~~TOP SECRET TRINE~~

The other major threat which developed in the III Corps area in the weeks immediately following the Tet attacks was in Binh Duong Province, as PAVN 7th Division elements entered the area and mounted a threat to several key Allied positions, notably Lai Khe. As noted earlier, 7th Division elements had participated in the 1 and 3 February assaults on Allied base camps in the area. As indicated, enemy message activity at the end of January and in early February had expressed extreme interest in such major Allied posts as Cu Chi, Dau Tieng, Phu Cuong and Lai Khe. Following these assaults, enemy elements continued to concentrate in Binh Duong during February. On 7 February, USA reported that 7th Division elements were attempting to tie down Allied forces at Lai Khe:

"Recently available SIGINT information indicates that elements of the PAVN 7th Division have moved into Binh Duong Province and apparently have the mission of containing Allied forces at Lai Khe ... and preventing these forces from being used elsewhere. According to collateral, Lai Khe is the base camp for the 3rd Brigade of the US 1st Division.

Messages since 1 February between two possible III elements ... located near Ben Cat ... and Lai Khe have contained references to attacks on both locations. On 1 February, the subordinate stated that the mission of the "infantry force" of the 7th Division would be "to contain Lai Khe" while the mission of Communist local forces would be to "reattack Ben Cat". On the same date the control authority spoke of a "joint operation" with the 7th Division "to control Lai Khe". According to collateral, Lai Khe was attacked on 1 and 3 February.

The possible 7th Division and its forward element had relocated from northeastern Tay Ninh Province to positions north-northeast of Lai Khe-Ben Cat by 4 February. ..."

~~TOP SECRET~~

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BINH LONG

PHUOC LONG

• Sub, Tay Ninh ctd w. Hk. 8 Feb  
• 7th Div 4 Feb

• U/I Sub assoc with 141st Regt, 4 Feb

• MI Control 11 Feb

• 165th Regt 22 Feb

• U/I Ctl 9 Feb

• Sub, Tac Ctl 15 Feb

• Lai Khe

• Tac Ctl, 15 Feb

• MI Sub assoc with 51st Bn 11 Feb

• Sub, Tay Ninh ctd watch 8 Feb

• Ben Cat

• MI B COSVN 15 Feb

• Sub, Tac Ctl 14 Feb

• U/I Ctl 18 Feb

• U/I, 8 Feb

BIEN HOA

BINH DUONG

ENEMY ELEMENTS IN LAIKHE-BEN CAT AREA, FEBRUARY 1960

• U/I Front 21 Feb

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2/O/VCN/171-68 072156Z February 1968 FOLLOW-UP IN 31 TO 2/O/VCN/132-68

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A.D.F information continued to indicate the movement of additional enemy elements into the Lai Khe area during the next few days. On 12 February the SMS reported that two MI elements subordinate to COSVN which had been reporting on the Lai Khe area since 1 February were probably associated with a 52nd Battalion. The SMS noted that collateral sources list a 52nd Battalion as subordinate to the VC 69th Artillery Regiment. This identification was further supported by a message from the MI subordinate, who reported that the unit had fired at 0600, 1400 and 1700G. According to collateral reports, the SMS continued, Lai Khe had been brought under fire attack on 8 and 10 February.

*objective fact*

The 13 February SMS cited a 12 February message in which the MI subordinate informed its control station that Communist shelling on 11 February had hit the airfield and damaged a truck. The subordinate also reported extensively on Allied activity in the area.

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3/O/STY/137-68 12 February 1968; 3/O/STY/138-68 13 February 1968

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SEAS for 15 February disclosed that a new communications group consisting of a control and three outstations had appeared in Binh Duong Province on 1 February. The 16 February SEAS reported that a tactical control authority and two subordinates, both associated with the 7th Division, had relocated to Binh Duong Province from Tay Ninh and Binh Long Province in recent days.

On 19 February, the SEAS reported that the MI element which had been reporting on this area had reported firing on five targets in the Lai Khe area on the night of 17-18 February.

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3/O/STY/440-68 15 Feb 68; 3/O/STY/441-68 16 Feb 68; 3/O/STY/443-68 19 Feb 68

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These attacks were apparently part of the wave of coordinated assaults which struck 21 major targets throughout South Vietnam that night. Following these attacks, enemy elements refrained from major action at that time.

V THE ASSESSMENT OF PRE-TET INTELLIGENCE

A. SIGINT INFORMATION DURING THE PRE-TET PERIOD

1. NATURE OF THE TET OFFENSIVE AND ITS EFFECTS ON SIGINT CAPABILITY

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Once the enemy had determined to make urban centers the primary target for Tet attacks, several advantages accrued. A ground assault on a district town, which is freely accessible, especially during Tet, is far less complicated than an assault on a major military installation. The force required is far smaller, and it does not need nearly the level of preparation, training and discipline mandatory in an attack on a target such as Dak To or Duc Co. The lesser time needed for preparation and the lower standard of training and discipline demanded in attacks on urban centers enabled the enemy to augment depleted local units with fresh levies shortly before the Tet attacks, and even during them. Since even ineffective local force units were capable of small attacks on minor urban centers, the enemy was able to attack many targets, many with a force of well under 100 men. In most provinces, major targets were not attacked; the Tet Offensive in those areas consisted of a series of small attacks linked mainly by the fact that all struck on the same night.

In III Corps, for example, taking attacks delivered in the first wave, the night of 30-31 January, in all but two of the eleven provinces, CIA estimates of the attack force, province-wide, did not surpass 400. This meant that none of the forces attacking individual cities could have exceeded 150-200 men. Only in Saigon and in the Bien Hoa-

Long Binh area were large-scale attacks conducted. The same is true for at least ten of the sixteen provinces in IV Corps.

In their assessment of the enemy attacks, several military commanders referenced the "premature" attacks in II Corps. General Westmoreland, in characterizing them as "premature", indicated that he considered this as evidence that the enemy had sacrificed coordination for security. A review of available SIGINT, however, suggests that the attacks in II Corps were scheduled for 29-30 January, and their execution on that date was as planned. The reason for the launching of these attacks a day earlier than attacks in the remaining Corps zones is not clear, but it was planned, and not a mistake caused by a lack of coordination.

For example, attacks in the coastal provinces of MR 5 were directed by Hq, MR 5 Main Force Unit Control. Several messages destined for enemy headquarters throughout the area (Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Khanh Hoa and Phu Yen) were passed by Hq, MR 5 MFUC. These messages discussed the forthcoming enemy drive, and referenced "N-Day" plans. A considerable volume of unreadable messages were passed to these headquarters as well. Further, Hq, MR 5 activated Forward Tactical Elements in these areas to direct operations. Yet, attacks in

Binh Dinh (3rd Division) and in the Phu Yen-Khanh Hoa province area

(5th Division) commenced on the night of 29-30 January, despite the presence of personnel from the III 5 Headquarters staff. This was a day before operations commenced in the three northern provinces of MR 5, Quang Nam, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai, which opened in conjunction with other operations in I Corps on the night of 30-31 January.

Enemy activity in Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa commenced the same day as attacks elsewhere in II Corps, which were under the direction of the B3 Front. Like Hq, III 5 AFUC, Hq, B3 Front despatched headquarters elements to the Pleiku city, Duc Co and Ban Me Thuot areas to direct operations, again implying fairly good coordination.

Finally, Hq, B3 Front was receiving high-precedence messages from COSVN, as were enemy commands in III and IV CTZs, where operations did not commence until 31 January, a day later than operations in the II Corps area. It is extremely unlikely that both Hq, B3 Front and Hq, MR 5 could have been misinformed about the scheduled date for the offensive, since both headquarters received many of the same high-precedence messages as did commands in other areas. And, as seen, these headquarters established more than adequate coordination among PAVN units in their areas, which launched some of the attacks on 30 January.

Thus, it would appear that the 30 January attacks in II Corps, although a day earlier than those delivered elsewhere, were actually scheduled for that date.

As indicated in the review of Tet attacks, many of the best PAVN and Main Force VC units were not committed to battle in the first wave of assaults. These forces were positioned near several major Allied military targets, apparently given the mission of containing Allied reaction forces, and preparing for follow-up attacks on Allied bases. However, as noted earlier, this new wave of attacks was generally canceled. A brief review of the activities of PAVN regimental and division entities and VC divisions during the Tet attacks is illustrative of these points:

#### I CORPS

In the m. TTH (Quang Tri-Thua Thien) area, collateral and SIGINT indicate that the enemy had available the PAVN 4th, 4th, 6th, 9th, 29th, 803rd and 812th regiments south of the US Marine defense line. Collateral indicates that a majority of these forces were engaged, Major elements of both the 5th and 812th regiments participated in the attack on Quang Tri City, and 803rd Regiment elements were active against targets in other areas of the Province. Major elements of the

PAVN 4th, 6th and 29th Regiments were involved in the early stages of the battle for Hue, and 29th Regiment elements continued to cling to positions in the citadel for several weeks. Other 4th Regiment elements were active against Phu Loc. Activities of the PAVN 9th Regiment during this period are not known, and collateral did not reflect this unit's participation in Tet attacks.

In the Quang Nam-Quang Tin Province area, the PAVN 2nd Division; the PAVN 31st Regiment; and the PAVN 68th and 3683 Artillery Regiments were available. In Quang Nam Province, elements of the PAVN 3rd Regiment, 2nd Division took part in the attack on Hoi An, and in Quang Tin, elements of the PAVN 21st Regiment, 2nd Division joined the attack on Tam Ky. The 1st VC Regiment, although its movements in the immediate pre-Tet period closely paralleled those of the 3rd PAVN Regiment, was apparently withheld from Tet attacks.

3683 Artillery Regiment elements shelled Danang, and one battalion of the 31st Regiment reportedly was engaged in attacks in Quang Nam.

Thus, in I Corps, most of the available units were, in fact, used. Although attacks in some areas, like Hue, continued, only scattered and light new actions were initiated in subsequent days.

## II CORPS

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In II Corps, the posture was considerably different, as substantial forces were held out of the first wave of Tet attacks, particularly in the B3 Front area of Kontum, Pleiku and Darlac. In this area, the B3 Front could call on the PAVN 24th, 32nd, 33rd, 66th, 95B and 174th Infantry Regiments and the PAVN 40th Artillery Regiment. 40th Artillery Regiment elements conducted fire attacks on several targets, often in support of infantry assaults. The PAVN 33rd Regiment took part in the attack on Ban Xe Thuot; at least two battalions of the 24th Regiment were engaged in the attack on Kontum city, and at least one battalion of the PAVN 95B Regiment joined in the attack on Pleiku city.

However, the PAVN 32nd, 66th and 174th Regiments were withheld from the 30 January attacks. Following the initial assaults on the night of 29-30 January, intensive preparations and intelligence collection strongly indicated that the enemy was readying major attacks on Dak To and Duc Co. The assault on Duc Co was to be delivered by an unidentified force from the PAVN 1st Division; the threat to Dak To developed from all three of the regiments which had been withheld, the PAVN 32nd, 66th and 174th Regiments. Significantly, these three regiments had all participated in the fierce battles around Dak To in November 1967, and, presumably, were well acquainted with the area.

Intelligence collection in the Dak To-Tan Canh Airfield area was extremely heavy, and on 31 January and 1 February, ARDF located the three regiments well inside Kontum Province, west of Dak To, and approximately 10-20 kilometers from the base. They had all moved there from the Cambodia-Kontum border. During the next few days, PAVN elements edged even closer, but the only ground assault was a probing attack by the 2nd Battalion, 174th Regiment. PAVN 40th Artillery Regiment elements were also identified in the area, and extensive intelligence collection continued.

However, by the end of the first week in February, the concentration had broken up, as the 32nd and 174th Regiments withdrew to Cambodia prior to moving south to new operational areas in Pleiku and Darlac Provinces, and the 66th Regiment moved away from Dak To, although remaining in Kontum Province. Similarly, no major attack developed in the Duc Co area.

In Binh Dinh Province, only the PAVN 18th Regiment, 3rd Division was reportedly engaged. The remaining two regiments of the PAVN 3rd Division, the PAVN 22nd and VC 2nd Regiments, were not engaged, although they had moved into positions in close proximity to Bong Son and Phu My, respectively, in late January.

In the 5th Division area of Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa, at least one battalion of the 95th Regiment and at least two battalions of the 17B regiment took part in Tet attacks.

### III CORPS

In this area, the pattern of withholding major PAVN and VC units from the initial attacks in order to employ them in follow-up attacks directed against more purely military targets if the first wave succeeded is more apparent. In the II Corps area, there were three enemy divisions. The PAVN 7th was composed of the PAVN 101st, 141st and 165th Regiments; the VC 5th encompassed the VC 274th and 275th and PAVN 88th Regiments; and the VC 9th had the VC 271st, 272nd and 273rd Regiments. In the initial wave of attacks, only two of these nine were committed, and, significantly, neither was employed against an urban center. The 274th and 275th Regiments were engaged in assaults against Bien Hoa Airbase and FFV II Headquarters in the Bien Hoa-Long Binh area, representing the only commitment of these three divisions in the first wave. The majority of the remaining seven regiments of these three divisions were concentrated near American base camps in the Dau Nghia-Binh Duong Province area, poised to engage American forces of the 1st and 25th Divisions moving to the relief of Saigon, if events developed according to enemy plans.

In the next few days, some of these regiments were brought to battle, the most notable engagement being the firefight between the US 28th Regiment and elements of the VC 272nd and 273rd Regiments near Phu Cuong, approximately 25 kilometers north of Saigon. Intensive intelligence collection during the next few days continued to indicate that enemy attention was focused on major 1st and 25th Division base camps at Dau Tieng, Lai Khe, Cu Chi and Phu Cuong. On 1 and 4 February, fire attacks and probes developed in the vicinity of these bases, and PAVN 7th Division elements reportedly were chiefly responsible. However, no major attacks developed, and intelligence collection eventually subsided.

The activity in III Corps, therefore, strongly supports the theory that major enemy combat elements were not committed to the first wave, but were preparing for a devastating series of new attacks against some of the most vital Allied positions in South Vietnam. As noted, 33 Front elements in late January and early February discussed a new wave of attacks. They freely and frequently referenced a new phase of activity scheduled to commence on 3 February. The focus of enemy maneu-

vers and intelligence collection efforts left little doubt that this second phase would be directed against military targets, and preliminary probes and shellings occurred at several locations, notably Dak To, Duc Co, Lanang, and the complex of American base camps in the Binh Luong-Hau Nghia Province area.

At the beginning of February, the enemy had reason to be optimistic about the future course of his campaign. Communist troops were still fighting in Ban Me Thuot,alat, Kontum, and many other locations; the battle for Hue was still in doubt; and fresh enemy units were moving toward Saigon. In addition, the drive against Khe Sanh was waxing, with the overrunning of Lang Vei just a few days away, and 320th Division elements were renewing enemy efforts against Con Thien. Allied forces were tied down, and the South Vietnamese governmental apparatus, particularly on the local level, was in chaos. At that point, it appeared that a second wave, directed against military targets, would have great effect.

By 5 February, the situation had changed. The Allies had begun to sweep enemy remnants from Saigon, and enemy forces in Hue were contained in the walled city, across the river. Elsewhere, enemy forces had been driven out of all major towns, except for scattered elements hol-

ding isolated strong points in a few towns. Allied forces had made a remarkable recovery, and it was now evident that a series of attacks against strong Allied positions would fail, and only add to the already severe losses incurred by enemy forces during Tet. Accordingly, the major ground assaults which had been contemplated were aborted, and only desultory shelling and light probes were delivered, although fighting continued in Hue and Saigon on a reduced scale. On the night of 18 February, the enemy mortared and shelled 21 targets in South Vietnam as a last flare-up, thus bringing to a close the Tet Offensive, although Allied commanders and intelligence personnel remained in a state of hyperalertness for any signs of a new offensive, particularly against Saigon.

The nature of the Tet Offensive with its unprecedented wide-spread attacks on urban centers and the extensive use of local forces significantly reduced the capability of the SIGINT community to provide advance warning of the exact nature and targets of the enemy offensive. During the past two or three years, SIGINT analysts have been able to follow closely the activities of large PAVN and Main Force VC units, and have achieved an excellent record in warning Allied commanders of enemy intentions in advance. However, only a handful of local force

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enemy units have ever been identified in radio communications, and only a few of the independent Main Force battalions have ever been identified.

Traffic analytic continuity on those units that have been identified has been difficult to establish and almost impossible to maintain because of the sporadic and interrupted nature of their communications. SIGINT

indicators of impending hostile action are centered around the interpretation of communications behavior of enemy units and the reading

of messages passed over military intelligence and low-level tactical

communications. These indicators were present in abundance in the pre-

Tet period, however, as noted, most of them concerned the planned second

wave. SIGINT developed a considerable volume of information about

enemy intentions against Duc Co and Dak To, following enemy units into

position and reading their attack plans. Similarly, SIGINT provided

information on the enemy threat to Allied base camps at Khe Sanh, Lai

Khe, Phu Cuong and Cu Chi in the Binh Duong-Binh Nghia Province area.

Again, SIGINT detailed the enemy buildup and gleaned information from

MI messages which discussed attack plans. The concentration of enemy

elements in the Hue, Ban Me Thuot, Hoi An and other areas also provi-

ded advance warning of forthcoming hostile action.

But, as indicated, the enemy employed smaller Main Force and local

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VC units extensively during the first wave, significantly degrading the effectiveness of SIGINT support. SIGINT support is predicated on the ability to follow the activities of enemy units in communications; as noted, only a few of the enemy units which took part in the initial attacks have ever been identified in communications; fewer still are monitored regularly.

## 2. REVIEW OF MAJOR SIGINT INDICATORS AND THEIR OBSERVANCE IN THE PRE-TET PERIOD

In reviewing the Tet attacks, some evaluators suggest that many key consumers, notably at the Washington level, tended to discount available information because intelligence information has, in the past, warned of innumerable enemy threats which did not materialize. Thus, they imply, the warnings came through somewhat diluted, in that consumers were unable to accept the enemy capability to attack in so many areas at once, and felt SIGINT sources were overstating their case.

However, a review of the SIGINT information summarized in this chapter indicates that this attitude was not justified. Throughout the I, II and III Corps areas, there was an abundance of SIGINT indications of forthcoming enemy activity which have, in the past, proven exceptionally valid. In recent years, SIGINT has scored an impressive

Lesson  
Learned  
Educate  
The USA

string of successes in forecasting major enemy-initiated operations, based on the reading of established SIGINT indicators. The Allied command has come to place great reliance on this information, and has consistently taken action in response to SIGINT-indicated threats. Some combination of these indicators has accompanied nearly all major enemy-initiated activity, and when a combination of such indicators is observed, it invariably means that the enemy has scheduled major tactical activity for that area, and in the immediate future. Obviously, these attacks are not always delivered, but when they are not, it simply reflects the enemy decision that conditions are no longer favorable, often as a result of pre-emptive Allied action triggered by SIGINT warnings. In many cases, collateral has confirmed the cancellation of enemy attacks forecast by SIGINT.

As will be seen in succeeding paragraphs, SIGINT reported a large volume of valid indicators, providing the Allied command with a steady stream of the type of information which, in recent years, Allied commanders have accepted, relied on, and acted upon. In introducing the summary of major SIGINT indications provided to consumers in the pre-Tet period, it would be helpful to review the most useful and universal of these indicators.

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The activation of forward tactical headquarters by major enemy headquarters or divisions is a crucial indicator. These elements provide their parent headquarters with the command and control apparatus required to effectively coordinate the activity of a remote or diverse force.

The institution of tactical signal plans by enemy elements is also exceptionally significant. These plans provide for simplified and more streamlined communications procedures, even though a measure of security is sacrificed. The initiation of these plans is preceded by the silence of normal signal plans serving the units involved. Since new tactical signal plans are not always readily intercepted and identified, a communications silence on occasion has signaled the implementation of tactical communications by the units involved. The observance of tactical signal plans indicates that tactical activity is imminent, and has been one of the most trusted SIGINT indicators.

Concentrations of enemy elements in a given area is valid evidence of enemy interest, and usually occurs within a week of the scheduled attack.

Communications alert status for enemy units is another reliable indicator. One manifestation of this alert status is, of course, the

implementation of tactical signal plans, which provide simplified and thus more reliable communications. In addition, the initiation of increased, often hourly scheduling is often observed. In many cases, the order to implement increased scheduling is passed in a readable message, which precedes by little more than a day the scheduled date for the attack, particularly in the III Corps area. High message volume, and the passing of high-precedence traffic bearing such instructions as "decrypt immediately" are other indications of communications alert status.

The resumption of intelligence collection by MI elements serving a given unit is another reliable indicator that forthcoming activity by that unit is imminent. Messages passed over MI facilities reflect intensive intelligence collection in the target area. Both MI messages and those passed over low-level tactical facilities reveal enemy attack plans in considerable detail, by enabling SIGINT analysts to read orders passed from enemy headquarters elements to their reconnaissance and combat subordinates operating in the target area.

To review briefly the list of the most significant indicators:

Activation of tactical forward elements by enemy divisions or administrative headquarters.

Implementation of tactical signal plans.

Concentrations of enemy elements.

Communications alert status, as suggested by increased scheduling, and abnormal message activity.

Increased activity by AI elements.

Readable messages.

An examination of available SIGINT in the pre-Tet period, area by area, reveals numerous examples of the observance and reporting of these indicators. In MR TTH, SIGINT reported an increasingly important role for Forward Element, HQ, MR TTH. This formation moved into the Hue area approximately one month before Tet and communicated with a steadily increasing number of MR TTH combat units. SIGINT later revealed a substantial concentration of enemy elements in the Hue area, featuring the Forward Element, and warned of renewed enemy interest in the Hue area in the 23 January 1968. However, the implementation of a tactical signal plan by enemy units in the Hue area was not discovered until several days after the battle for Hue had begun.

In the B3 Front area, readable messages provided a wealth of detail concerning planned enemy actions in the Dak To and Duc Co areas. Hq, B3 Front activated several headquarters elements - one northeast of Pleiku city, to coordinate attacks on Pleiku and Le Thanh, and possibly the attack on Kontum city as well. Another, through a 1st Division headquarters element, exercised control over operations in the Duc Co area. Still another was activated in southern Darlac, and, moving in conjunction with the PAVN 33rd Regiment, directed the attack on Ban Me Thuot.

Concentrations of enemy elements were noted in the Cambodia-Kontum Province border area, west of Dak To; in the Kontum-Pleiku Province border area northeast of Pleiku city; in the Pleiku-Cambodia border area, and near Ban Me Thuot.

SIGINT catalogued the expansion of MI reporting by MI elements subordinate to Hq, B3 Front and Hq, 1st Division in the days preceding Tet. Several new MI elements were activated, and these elements were exceptionally active in the Duc Co and Dak To areas.

In the PAVN 3rd Division area in Binh Dinh, SIGINT revealed a repositioning of 3rd Division elements toward the coast in late January, into the vicinity of several major towns. Similarly, ADF re-

sults disclosed a movement by 2nd Division combat elements from their bases in the Que Son area of the Quang Nam-Quang Tin border region toward the Quang Nam-Quang Tin coast. Enemy messages, sent to all major commands in the coastal provinces (Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa) discussed attack preparations, and "N-Day". Forward Tactical Elements were activated by Hq, IR 5 in both the 2nd and 3rd Division area. All three regiments of the 2nd Division were in an attack posture, as evidenced by the maintenance of tactical control over these units by the Forward Element, Hq, 2nd Division. Finally, on 30 January, just prior to the initiation of Tet attacks in the 2nd Division area, SIGINT reported the implementation of a tactical signal plan by 2nd Division elements as of 30 January, a sure sign that attacks were imminent.

In III Corps, a variety of these indicators were also observed. New control stations serving Forward Elements of the VC 5th and PAVN 7th Divisions were observed. Concentrations of enemy elements developed in Tay Ninh, Binh Duong and southern Bien Hoa provinces. Indications of a communications alert status were provided by the reappearance of several communications links which had been inactive recently. Military Intelligence elements serving the VC 5th and 9th Divisions,

inactive for several weeks, resumed communications and reporting in early January. On 25 January the VC 9th Division, which had resumed radio communications with its subordinate regiments only a few days earlier, began passing tactical messages to its subordinate 271st Regiment. COSVN, during the week preceding Tet, was heavily engaged in exchanging high-precedence messages with major headquarters throughout II, III and IV Corps.

Throughout South Vietnam, therefore, enemy communications in the pre-Tet period manifested SIGINT indicators which have, in the past, consistently pointed to impending action by the units involved. To a large extent, however, these indicators warned of a series of scheduled as follow-ups to the first wave, in which urban centers were attacked, mainly by local forces. Thus, although the SIGINT warnings were loud and unmistakable, they were generally unable to pinpoint the targets of the enemy's first wave, with a few exceptions such as Hue and Ban Me Thuot. The reliance on local force and small main force units, which cannot be followed in radio communications, diminished the capacity of SIGINT to forecast the nature of the enemy offensive, although the continuous and wide-spread observance of indicators of

attack alerted consumers to the fact that a massive, well-coordinated enemy offensive was planned. 180

B. THE FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY BOARD INVESTIGATION

On 23 February 1968, approximately three weeks after the start of the Tet Offensive, a memorandum was prepared for the President by his Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, under the signature of its Chairman, General Maxwell D. Taylor. This memorandum informed the President that the Board was undertaking an investigation into the alleged "intelligence failure" which occurred at the time of the Tet Offensive.

In pursuing this investigation, the Board met with representatives of the principal US organizations which are responsible for producing intelligence information relating to Vietnam. On 23 February, the Board directed the intelligence community to conduct a study of intelligence bearing on the enemy buildup during the two weeks preceding the Tet attacks, and report its findings by 1 April. In response to this directive, a working group was formed, chaired by Mr R. J. Smith of CIA, and including representatives of the State Department, DIA, NSA, and Joint Staff, JCS. The working group visited Vietnam in March, and joined by observers from CINCPAC and MACV, it met with

Ambassador Bunker, General Westmoreland, and numerous American combat and intelligence officers. The group also interviewed key South Vietnamese military figures, including Corps commanders; the Deputy Director of the National Police; and the J-2, Joint General Staff and his deputy. The working group also reviewed in detail various relevant intelligence documents.

#### 1. THE NSA MEMO TO THE WORKING GROUP

Mr. Milton Zaslow, the NSA representative on the working group directed NSA to prepare a memo listing NSA product issued during the two weeks preceding Tet attacks which provided advance information on enemy attack plans. The memo answered the questions:

"What substantive evaluated information bearing on the attack on the cities reached the following officials in the period January 15-30? (1) General Westmoreland, (2) JCS, (3) Secretary of Defense, (4), DCI, (5) The President."

The NSA memo then reviewed relevant NSA product during the period:

"On 17 January the first in a series of SIGINT reports providing information relating to attacks in SVN was released from NSA. These SIGINT reports dealt with information primarily concerning intended VC/PAVN attacks to be launched against cities in the B3 front area (i.e. Kontum, Pleiku, Parlac Provinces), the ML 5 coastal Province area (i.e. Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh), and -- to a lesser degree -- the city of Hue.

On 24 January SIGINT reports were released which stated that the attacks to take place in the aforementioned provinces were imminent although no specific date or time could be determined for their launching.

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The accumulation of SIGINT data available by 25 January provided evidence of a coordinated Vietnamese Communist attack to occur in several areas of South Vietnam in the near future. While the bulk of the evidence indicated the most critical indications of attack to be in the northern half of the country, there was sufficient evidence which prompted NSA to state that Vietnamese Communist units in Nam Bo would possibly be involved as well. This accumulated SIGINT data and the SIGINT analysts interpretation of same was reported on 25 January.

Subsequent to the publication of this report and before the initiation of the "Tet Offensive", NSA published some 10 follow-up reports-- all of which contained information supplemental to the basic report-- which indicated that VC/P.VN units in South Vietnam were preoccupied with preparations for imminent attacks.

The above SIGINT data was provided to the White House Situation Room through the existent NSA internal forwarding procedures which directs that selected high interest items be provided to the White House Sit Room. All SIGINT reports produced from 28 January onward which were related to the impending coordinated Vietnamese Communist offensive, included the White House as an addressee; this service was in response to the specific request received from them. Distribution of all these reports included: Military Assistance Command, Vietnam; I Field Force, Vietnam; II Field Force, Vietnam; Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force; Commander in Chief, Pacific; Central Intelligence Agency; State Department; Defense Intelligence Agency; Joint Chiefs of Staff; National Intelligence Center."

The remainder of the memo briefly summarized a total of 23 relevant reports and S.I.S. items which provided advance warning of enemy attack plans. In addition to the 25 January report and the ten cited follow-ups available before Tet, there were eight additional reports and four S.I.S. items not covered in the above reports. Nearly all of these were detailed in this chapter's review of pre-Tet intelligence.

Of interest is the fact that nearly all dealt with L. 5; the only cited items which did not concern L. 5 dealt with Hue and Thanh Binh.

2. THE WORKING GROUP'S INTERIM REPORT

On 28 March, Mr. Richard Lehman, Deputy Director of Current Intelligence, CIA, prepared a memo for the other members of the working group, Mr. Fred Greene, State Department; Major General Robert A. Glass, DIA; Colonel George C. Viney, JCS; and Mr. Milton Maslow, MIL. The memo accompanied a draft of the interim report scheduled for submission to General Taylor by 1 April.

The interim report opened with a review of the group's visit to South Vietnam, and noted the American and South Vietnamese officers and officials contacted. The report indicated that its findings showed that the intelligence community had done well:

"3. ... There was ample evidence, both in Saigon and Washington, that the enemy was preparing for a series of coordinated attacks, probably on a larger scale than ever before. There was evidence in the latter part of January that these attacks were imminent and some of the targets had been identified. Both in Saigon and in Washington, this intelligence was communicated to senior military and political officers, and resulted in a series of actions in Vietnam which considerably reduced the impact of the enemy offensive.

4. The strategic warning thus provided represents no small achievement for the US intelligence apparatus in Vietnam. ..."

The report noted that we have not achieved high-level clandestine penetration of the Communist hierarchy. In addition, high-level enemy communications are unreadable, forcing intelligence personnel to rely on the analysis of a huge volume of low-level reports of

doubtful validity, and to sift out key items from the "blare of background noise". The report noted the "crying wolf" problem, suggesting that although agent reports of many of the attacks were available, there was no doubt that "similar reports could be found for many other cities and many other dates". The validity of SIGINT indicators in attempting to verify collateral warnings is manifest; these indicators were discussed in preceding paragraphs.

The report then reviewed the degree of surprise attained by the enemy:

"6. Despite the degree of strategic warning provided, the enemy achieved a considerable degree of tactical surprise. ... The most important factor in this was timing. Few US or GVN officials believed the enemy would attack during Tet, and for good reason. ... General Westmoreland expected heavy attacks either just before or just after Tet, and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff had authorized 50% leaves. Evidence to upset this general belief did not come to hand until 24 hours or so before the general attacks were launched, the most important being the premature initiatives in Mt 5. In the short time available, US units could be alerted and were, but ARVN performance was spotty.

7. A second major factor of surprise was the number of simultaneous attacks mounted; US intelligence had given the enemy capability for coordinated attacks in a number of areas at once, but not in all areas at once. ...

8. Both Washington and Saigon were surprised by Communist emphasis on the use of Viet Cong rather than North Vietnamese, and local force rather than main force units. While they expected attacks on the cities, they did not expect the offensive to have the cities and the command and control centers as its primary objective. ..."

The report indicated that Allied surprise at the use of VC and emphasis on the cities stemmed from the disregarding of enemy propa-

ganda concerning the "winter-spring offensive". The report noted that there was no real reason for intelligence analysts to have taken this propaganda seriously, since in the past, similar grandiose enemy plans for offensives and general uprisings had not materialized.

The report then summarized the response to intelligence warnings by the Allied command in Saigon and by officials in Washington:

"9. Despite these gaps in their understanding of the enemy's plans, Washington and Saigon were, as stated earlier,

fully aware that the enemy planned a major offensive, probably coordinated attacks in northern I Corps, Dak To in the highlands of II Corps, and toward Saigon from northwestern III Corps. As early as 10 January, General Westmoreland had cancelled certain planned operations in northern III Corps in order to reposition US forces before Saigon. In subsequent days he issued a series of warnings to his commanders, and to the US Mission, that the enemy was planning to attack. Although he had not expected attacks during Tet, he recognized at once the significance of the premature attacks in I and II Corps and on 30 January notified all his commanders to expect attacks that night. As a result all US units were fully alerted, although in most cases they did not have time or information to take active measures against the enemy. ...

10. The urgency felt in Saigon was not, however, fully transmitted to Washington or understood there. As a result, finished intelligence disseminated in Washington did not contain the atmosphere of crisis present in Saigon, ... The information was transmitted and duly analyzed, but atmosphere is not readily passed over a teletype circuit. We believe, therefore, that senior officials in Washington received warnings in the period 28-30 January of forthcoming attacks, but these warnings did not differ sufficiently from earlier warnings to make the sender fully aware that the war was about to enter a new stage. ..."

The report reviewed Allied response to available pre-Tet intelligence in the four Corps areas. In I Corps, the enemy achieved the least degree of tactical surprise; the Tet truce had been cancelled

on 25 January, and US and Vietnamese troops were better prepared than elsewhere. Only in Hue did the enemy effect successful lodgement.

In II Corps, where attacks struck the first night, there was no 24 hour warning period <sup>similar to that</sup> which benefited commanders in other zones.

However, in compensation, far more intelligence was available, from SIGINT and other sources. Although Allied forces were surprised tactically, they were in a higher state of alertness than normal, especially during Tet, as a result of ample intelligence warnings.

In III Corps, there had been intelligence indications for some weeks which indicated that enemy units along the Cambodian border were moving toward Saigon. This, plus the attacks in II Corps on the night of 29-30 January prompted the Allied command to place III Corps and II FFV on general alert on 30 January. During the day, more specific information concerning the enemy attack on Saigon became available.

In IV Corps, the enemy attained the greatest degree of surprise, as almost no advance information regarding enemy intentions in that area was developed during the pre-Tet period. The chief warning signal was the wave of attacks in II Corps on 30 January. The report noted, in this context, that there was no communications intelligence capability in IV Corps at the time comparable to that in other Corps areas.

The report concluded by determining that the exchange of information and the coordination achieved between various intelligence producers was "remarkably good". They concluded that the minor problems encountered in the dissemination of relevant information between these intelligence producers did not affect the general intelligence picture.

Finally, the report noted that the enemy withheld many PAVN and Main Force VC units from the original attacks, intending to follow up the initial assaults with a new wave. However, in all but a few instances, the report concluded, these attacks were deferred because the initial attacks had not achieved the hoped-for objectives.

The SIGINT aspects of this report have been discussed in some detail in section A of this subheading. One point which stands out is the degree of reliance on SIGINT information. SIGINT evidence was the most significant pre-Tet intelligence. As indicated, the large volume of SIGINT information available concerning forthcoming enemy initiatives in I Corps played a significant role in General Westmoreland's decision to cancel the Tet truce in I Corps, as of 25 January. Strong SIGINT indications of a massive, Corps-wide enemy offensive in II Corps led to a posture of heightened alertness on the part of American units in that area, which reduced considerably the effects

of the enemy attacks. SIGINT information on enemy activities northwest of Saigon contributed to the conviction that an attack on Saigon was developing, although the 2 1/2 hour warning provided by the attacks in II Corps was a more significant factor. Finally, the working group specifically noted that the lack of SIGINT resources in IV Corps significantly degraded the quality of intelligence in that area.

### 3. THE FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY BOARD REPORTS TO THE PRESIDENT

On 7 June 1968, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board issued a memorandum for the President under the signature of its chairman, General Taylor. This memorandum contained the results of the Board's investigation. It began:

"In my memorandum dated February 23, 1968 you were informed that your Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board was looking into the "intelligence failure" which allegedly occurred at the time of the attacks on South Vietnamese cities during the Tet holiday last January. It was our purpose to determine insofar as possible (a) whether adequate intelligence indicators had been available to serve as warnings prior to the attacks; (b) whether these warnings reached the proper officials in time; and (c) what lessons bearing on intelligence might be learned from the experience."

The memo then reviewed the activities of the Board in carrying out its investigation, including the establishing of the working group by the intelligence community, and its activities. The memorandum then summarized the results of the inquiry:

"4. ... Throughout January, 1968 the intelligence apparatus was filled with indications that the enemy was preparing for a series of coordinated attacks on a larger scale than ever before attempted. Considering each corps area separately, the clearest advance warnings directed attention to the likelihood of attacks in I Corps, the Kontum-Pleiku areas of II Corps, and the vicinity of Saigon in III Corps. In IV Corps, the US intelligence apparatus received virtually no advance indications of the nature and extent of the attacks which occurred. ..."

This passage again emphasizes the degree to which pre-Tet intelligence estimates were based on SIGINT information. The passage notes that the clearest advance warnings were received in I and II Corps. In I Corps, the evidence indicating forthcoming attacks by PAVN 2nd Division elements in Quang Nam and Quang Tin has been detailed in this chapter, along with indications of an enemy threat to Hue. Of course, the enemy siege of Khe Sanh, which began in earnest on 21 January, was the major factor in General Westmoreland's decision to cancel the truce in I Corps.

In II Corps, the Board notes, the most significant advance warnings concerned the Kontum-Pleiku area, and the vast amount of SIGINT furnished on these areas has been reviewed. References to the likeli-

hood of attacks in the vicinity of Saigon are partially based on pre-Tet SIGINT information detailing the buildup of enemy elements in Bien Hoa and Binh Duong. In IV Corps, the Board reiterates, virtually no intelligence was received; this is the area where no SIGINT resources were available. Thus, when interviewed by the working group, Allied military commanders in South Vietnam almost invariably pointed to SIGINT information in detailing the significant pre-Tet intelligence information they had at their disposal. However, despite a few enemy messages indicating that there would be attacks in II Corps on 30 January, few believed a major attack would commence during Tet.

The Board's report notes this point:

"... With regard to the timing of the enemy's offensive, most of the intelligence evaluators concluded that the offensive most likely would occur just prior to or immediately following the Tet holiday period which extended from January 27 to February 3 1968. A few of the evaluators in the field, including General Westmoreland, included in their estimates the specific possibility that the offensive might take place during the Tet holidays. While some reports suggested the possibility of simultaneous attacks in certain areas the Board found none predicting the extent of the attacks which actually occurred or the degree of simultaneity achieved in their execution.

The board also notes that there was no intelligence available to suggest the extent and nature of the offensive:

"5. In the intelligence available in the pre-Tet period, many of the cities, towns and installations actually attacked were mentioned as possible targets. The Board finds little in the pre-TET intelligence suggesting that the country-wide attacks might concentrate on the cities and towns to the virtual exclusion of frontier targets or that the enemy might seek to establish lodgement in these urban areas and foment uprisings. The expectation seems to have been that the harassment of the cities and towns would be confined largely to mortar and rocket attacks, rather than the ground attacks which actually took place. ..."

The limitations of SIGINT capability imposed by the enemy's extensive reliance on small VC units has been discussed; this was the primary reason that SIGINT was unable to predict that attacks would occur in the huge number of urban centers which were invested, with the exception of Hue, Ban Me Thuot, and a few others. However, continual references to "1-day" in several areas, and the large volume of SIGINT indicators observed led to clear and concrete SIGINT warnings that a massive and well-coordinated enemy drive was in the offing. The 25 January report was only the first in a series of reports and SBAJ items which drew attention to the threat of simultaneous enemy attacks in many areas. The information provided, as indicated, a strategic warning to American commanders, which enabled them to take steps to insure a heightened alertness in their commands. The memo points this out, commenting:

"... Although the pre-Tet intelligence did not include precise warning as to the time and place of each major attack which was mounted it did serve as a general alert to field commanders without indicating the exact what, where, when and how of the impending attacks. Significantly, however, the Board found no case in which United States forces appeared to have suffered a defeat in this period because of a lack of timely intelligence."

The memo then quotes from the working group report, to indicate part of the reason that some senior officials in Washington felt that an intelligence failure contributed to enemy tactical success during Tet:

"The urgency felt in Saigon was not fully felt in Washington in the immediate pre-attack period. As a result, finished intelligence disseminated in Washington did not contain the atmosphere of crisis present in Saigon. ... Although senior officials in Washington received warnings in the period 28-30 January, they did not receive the full sense of immediacy and intensity which was present in Saigon. On the other hand, with Saigon alerted, virtually nothing could be done in Washington that late in the game which could effect the outcome. "

The memo follows this quotation with an evaluation:

"The Board agrees with much of this frank and revealing statement, particularly the view that many Washington intelligence reports failed to convey the same sense of urgency as existed in Vietnam. To cite two examples, the

daily CIA document, "The Situation in Vietnam" throughout January was filled with reports of possible enemy offensive actions but it was not until January 28 that the warning became loud and clear that a wide-spread coordinated series of attacks might be expected in the near future. In the period January 15-30, "The President's Daily Brief", which presumably represents the most important intelligence of the day warranting the attention of the President, contains on January 20 the first mention of a possible offensive. Thereafter it is silent on the subject until January 29 when a low-key item appeared noting that enemy forces in the Western Highlands were completing battle preparations."

It should be recalled that on 24 January, an NSA report warned of a major enemy offensive throughout the coastal provinces; the following day, 25 January, the lengthy report warning of a coordinated enemy offensive in I, II and III Corps, at least, was published. The Board postulated several reasons for the apparent failure of the Washington-based producers of finished intelligence to attach the proper weight to those clear intelligence warnings developed by the COMINT community:

"8. The Board does not agree that this difference of tone in intelligence reporting in Washington is beyond criticism. Several factors probably contributed to this difference: (a) the appearance of intelligence indicators against a background clutter of conflicting or confusing reports which dulled to some extent the sharpness of the warnings conveyed; (b) the difficulty of framing synthesized reports accurately portraying a distant situation; (c) the effect of the reworking of reports in intermediate intelligence agencies between the field and senior Washington officials; and (d) the difficulty at the Washington level of sorting out and properly emphasizing the important in the mass of intelligence flowing to Washington from the field."

This passage points to a difference in the attitude toward

SIGINT between finished intelligence producers and field commanders in Vietnam, from the MACV level on down. These field commanders continually rely on SIGINT, and readily accept its warnings. The SIGINT apparatus has earned the confidence of field commanders by a long history of successful support. The type of information made available

to the Allied command by the SIGINT community in the pre-Tet period was that which had been successfully exploited by a long list of American combat commanders in Vietnam. Therefore, the SIGINT evidence in the pre-Tet period was readily accepted at the Saigon level.

In contrast, the producers of finished intelligence in Washington apparently lent less weight to SIGINT, so witness the delay of several days before the strong US warnings of 21 and 25 January were reflected in the US daily publications and the President's Daily Brief. The requisite SIGINT reports were available to the producers of finished intelligence, but were apparently subordinated in cases of less reliable information from other sources.

The memo then noted that inordinate delays in the passing of intelligence information to senior Washington officials has led them to depend on raw intelligence brought to their attention by staff assistants who are not a part of the official intelligence apparatus. The quality of this information is, at best, questionable. In weighing the question of delays in the provision of intelligence to senior officials before Tet, two points should be considered. First, as noted, a large volume of SIGINT information was made available on a timely basis. This information consisted of strong and wide-spread intelli-

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gence indications which have been accepted and relied on in the past; it was believed and acted upon at the Saigon level. Second, one extremely significant factor, not mentioned in the report, which severely affected the ability of Washington-based intelligence producers and senior officials to respond to these warnings was the Pueblo situation. The Pueblo was seized on 23 January, and for several days, the ramifications of that act absorbed virtually the full attention of senior officials and finished intelligence producers. Having once concluded that attacks would not occur during Tet, they were convinced that attacks would not take place until after Tet, thus giving them a week's respite, and allowing them to occupy themselves with the Pueblo situation. It is apparent that the seizing of the Pueblo, more than any other single factor, was responsible for the surprisingly slow reactions to clear SIGINT warnings.

In Saigon, however, the SIGINT information induced a heightened alertness which had much to do with the cancellation of follow-up attacks, and the overall failure of the military side of the Tet offensive. As the memo has noted, given the state of alertness in Saigon, there was little Washington could contribute.

The memorandum then concluded:

"11. Based on its review, the Board concludes:

a. that the intelligence at hand contributed to the decision on 25 January to cancel the Tet truce in I Corps and to General Westmoreland's action on 30 January putting US commanders on full alert throughout South Vietnam just prior to the main attacks;

b. that intelligence contributed substantially to the result that the attacks on the cities were beaten off and that no permanent lodgments were achieved;

c. that the intelligence bearing on the Tet offensive proved adequate in that it alerted US commanders in time to permit them to carry out their missions successfully and, therefore, there are no grounds to support the charge of a major intelligence failure; ..."