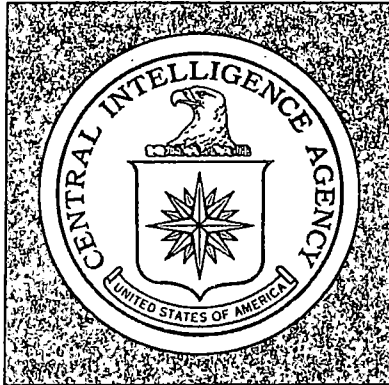


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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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28 February 1968

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

Reports from several rural areas indicate that the Viet Cong have almost complete freedom of movement there, even in formerly pacified sections. The relative lull in major Communist ground action activity continues, although there are indications of impending large-scale activity in several areas of the country.

I. Military Situation in South Vietnam: Communist military activity on 27-28 February was highlighted by continued shelling of allied strongpoints in northern and western Quang Tri Province, and by attacks in western Kontum Province, and against provincial and district capitals in III and IV Corps. On the allied side, US forces have inflicted heavy losses on the Viet Cong in Quang Tin Province and have launched two new spoiling operations against enemy units threatening Da Nang (Paras. 1-7). There are unconfirmed reports that North Vietnamese forces may be moving additional armored vehicles and rocket launchers southward into the Laotian infiltration corridor (Paras. 8-15). Evidence of Communist intentions to conduct sustained military operations in the western highlands mounts (Paras. 16-22). [redacted]

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: The latest labor leader arrested in Saigon was released a few hours after he had been picked up (Para. 1). Reports from several rural areas indicate that the Viet Cong have almost complete freedom of movement there, even in formerly pacified sections (Paras. 2-6). Defections to the Viet Cong are discussed (Paras. 7-12).

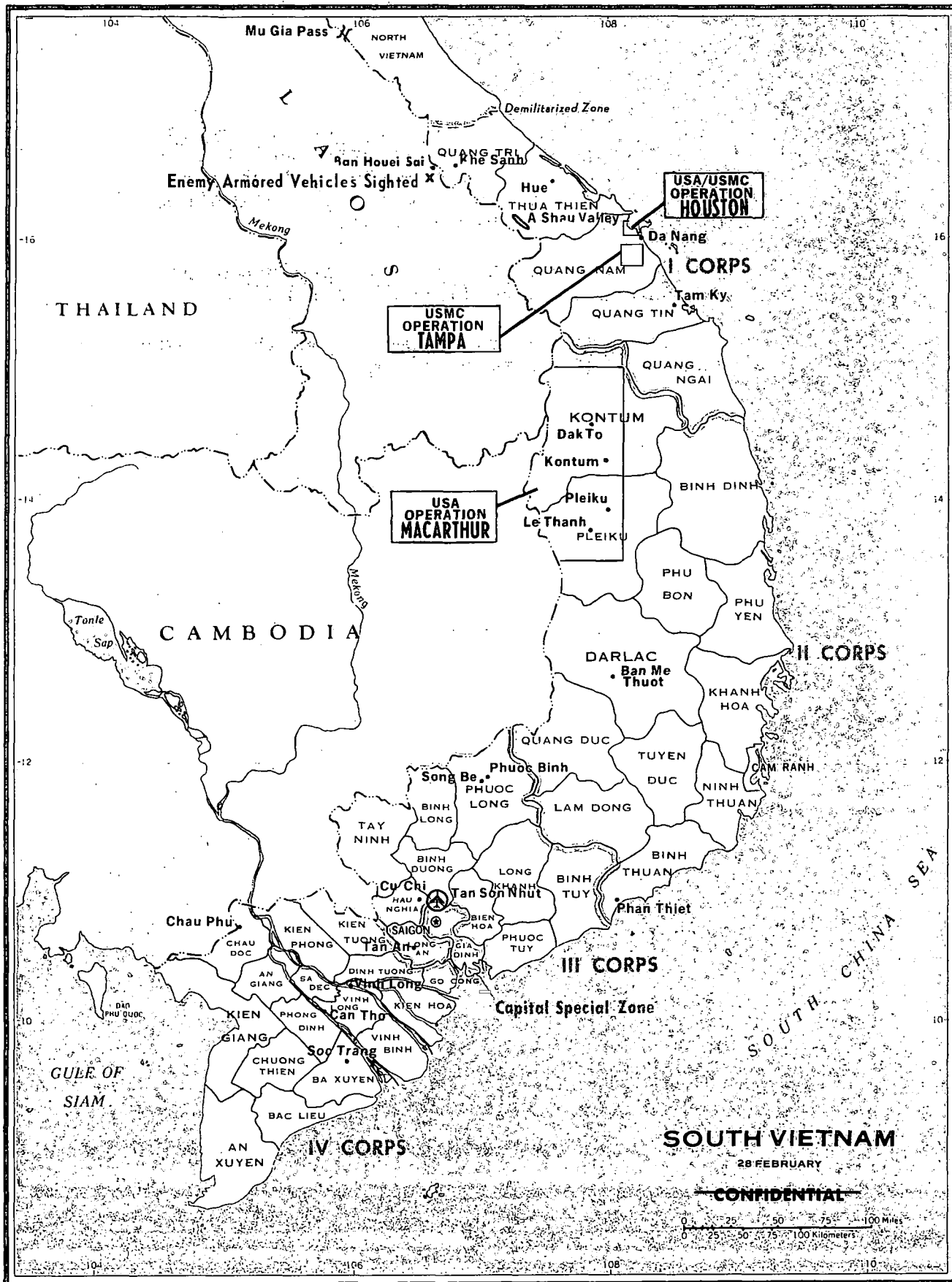
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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The network of allied strongpoints from Khe Sanh eastward across the Demilitarized Zone again received artillery, rocket, and mortar fire on 27-28 February. No significant North Vietnamese ground attacks were reported. Reconnaissance elements of two Communist divisions in the Khe Sanh area have intensified their detailed reporting on allied air strikes and ground activity as well as on the construction and repair of fortifications and fences at Khe Sanh.

2. The heaviest fighting in I Corps was in Quang Tin Province where, on 27 February, a US Army battalion attached to Operation WHEELER/WALLOWA killed 148 enemy in a four-hour firefight less than five miles west of the capital city of Tam Ky. US losses were two killed and 14 wounded. The enemy force encountered was tentatively identified as the 72nd Viet Cong Main Force Battalion.

3. In an effort to delay or disrupt renewed Communist offensive activity in the Da Nang area, US forces have launched two spoiling campaigns. Operation HOUSTON, a four-battalion US Marine/US Army task force, will try to secure the general area northwest of Da Nang, which includes strategic coastal Route 1 in the Hai Van Pass and Phu Loc area. Meanwhile, in Operation TAMPA, a reinforced US Marine battalion is tasked with the destruction of enemy staging and assembly areas ten miles west-southwest of Da Nang. No significant brushes with the enemy have thus far been reported from either operation.

4. Communist tactical activity in II Corps on 27 February was highlighted by attacks against three US Army companies attached to Operation MACARTHUR in Kontum Province. The first attack was aimed at two US companies operating west-northwest of Dak To and resulted in enemy losses of 50 killed and US losses of 4 killed and 22 wounded. The second attack--a mortar and small-arms assault--against one US company five miles north-northeast of Kontum city inflicted American casualties of 24 wounded. Enemy losses were not reported.

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5. In the coastal provinces of central Vietnam, the Binh Thuan provincial capital of Phan Thiet received small-scale enemy probes on 27-28 February. US Army airborne units operating just west of the capital reported killing 29 Viet Cong during this period.

6. Communist forces in III Corps continued their attacks-by-fire against provincial and district capitals on 27-28 February, with all eleven provinces reporting some form of Viet Cong activity. The most serious situation appeared to be in Phuoc Long Province, where the adjoining towns of Song Be and Phuoc Binh were reported under enemy ground attack. The Phuoc Binh airstrip was closed after Viet Cong ground fire destroyed a US C-130 aircraft on take-off. Elsewhere, rocket and mortar attacks were reported against US infantry base camps at Tan An, the capital of Long An Province, at Cu Chi in Hau Nghia Province, and against Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

7. In the IV Corps area, the provincial capitals of Chau Phu, Can Tho, Vinh Long city, and Soc Trang came under Viet Cong mortar and rocket attacks on 27-28 February.

New Heavy Enemy Weapons Reported

8. Reports during the past few days indicate that the North Vietnamese may be moving additional armored vehicles and rocket launchers down into the Laotian infiltration corridor. The reports are not confirmed.

9. A Laotian Army company commander who had been stationed just west of Khe Sanh at Ban Houei San before that outpost was overrun in late January claims that he saw and counted 174 pieces of heavy equipment including tanks, mobile assault guns, and artillery rocket launchers moving south in Laos the night of 11-12 February. The Laotian officer reportedly made the observations on Route 92 about 18 miles southwest of Khe Sanh as he was retreating overland toward government-held Laotian territory.

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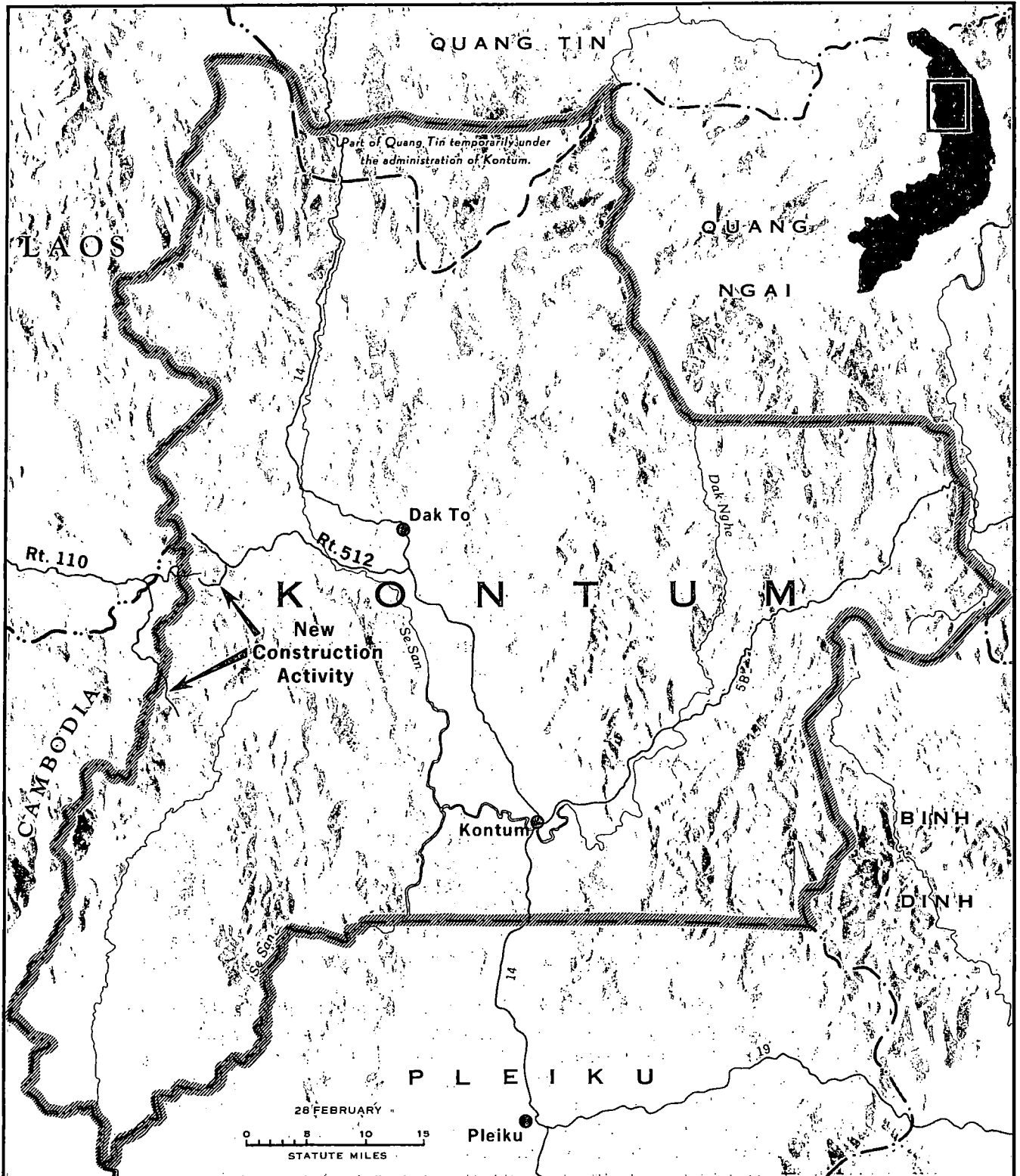
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New Infiltration Routes into Kontum Province



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15. A number of low-level agent reports have stated that the enemy intends to use tanks in the central highlands and northwest of Saigon. Allied troops reportedly engaged a force which was supported by tanks near the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh Province on 26 February. In addition, enemy tanks were sighted in Binh Long Province on 27 February, according to a preliminary report from an aerial observer. In general, however, the evidence of enemy tanks in the southern part of South Vietnam is rather tenuous at this time. The possibility exists that captured allied vehicles or even Cambodian vehicles might be involved.

The Western Highlands

16. Evidence of Communist intentions to conduct sustained military operations in the western highlands mounts.

17. Analysis of aerial photography of early February has revealed the further extension of a new road from the Communist-controlled road network in Laos through the Cambodian salient and into South Vietnam's Kontum Province in the vicinity of Dak To. Aerial photography of December 1967 provided the first indication of the extension of Laotian Route 110 to a point near the South Vietnamese border. By 9 February, this road had been extended across the Kontum Province border and joined with South Vietnamese Route 512. New occupied enemy defensive positions--personnel trenches, foxholes, automatic weapons/antiaircraft artillery sites--were also revealed in the 9 February photography at the junction of this new road and Route 512.

18. The completion of this road provides the Communists with a motorable logistical transport complex capable of supporting operations against a network of at least four US military installations in the Dak To area.

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19. Moreover, the photography revealed enemy road-clearing operations extending a branch of this same new route southward along the Cambodian - South Vietnamese border and into Kontum Province some 32 miles northwest of Kontum city.

20. Meanwhile, the pattern of deployment and [REDACTED] of major B-3 Front combat units in the highlands reflects preparations for early, coordinated attacks in the Dak To sector, in the Kontum city - Pleiku city region, in the Le Thanh area of western Pleiku, and in the Ban Me Thuot area of Darlac Province.

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21. Recently available [REDACTED] there has been a southerly move by some B-3 Front elements which normally operate in the western Kontum-Cambodian border area. For example, between 12 and 24 February, the 1st North Vietnamese Army Division's 32nd Regiment moved nearly 100 miles south-southeast from a spot west of Dak To to the Pleiku-Darlac province border area. The present communications of this regiment indicate that it may have been re-subordinated to a headquarters element of the B-3 Front which appears to be controlling military operations in the area. Elements of the 174th Infantry Regiment and the 40th Artillery Regiment have also shifted from the Dak To area to positions threatening the provincial capitals of Kontum and Pleiku.

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22. While the repositioning of these units has probably temporarily weakened the enemy's over-all offensive posture in the Dak To area, at least one regiment--the 66th of the 1st Division--along with artillery and other combat support units still pose a threat in western Kontum Province. Moreover, the completed construction of the previously mentioned roadway into western Kontum will facilitate the introduction of reinforcements and war materiel into the Dak To sector.

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Enemy Communications Standdown Along the Northern Coast

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[redacted] During the past few weeks there have been numerous indications that the enemy plans to launch additional attacks in this region, possibly in coordination with a move in the Khe Sanh area.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Labor leader To Thanh Tuyen was released from police custody a few hours after he was picked up on 27 February. Tuyen, president of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor's Saigon Council, had been detained for undetermined reasons, but was allowed to go after Saigon Mayor Van Van Cua intervened on his behalf. Cua told a union official that the police had overreacted to Hanoi radio appeals urging workers in Saigon to rise up against the government.

Grim Situation in Rural Areas

2. Reports beginning to come in on the situation in the rural areas of Vietnam indicate that, in several areas, the movement of allied military forces to the cities has left the countryside almost completely undefended. Pacified hamlets are no longer safe for travel in these areas, and authorities there cannot get out to the rural areas to assess the situation. The Vietnamese Army, in many cases, is locked in static defensive postures around the cities.

3. Local officials in Da Lat, capital of Tuyen Duc Province, say they have not yet been in contact with the rural areas. Although some commercial traffic has been moving along Routes 20 and 11, Vietnamese and American officials regard security as inadequate on these major roads. Until the Tet offensive, the two roads had been secure for more than two years. The Revolutionary Development chief for the province has been forbidden to leave Da Lat, and the province chief has made only helicopter visits and one heavily armed convoy trip to the districts.

4. Of the 11 Regional Force companies normally assigned to Tuyen Duc, three were brought in to defend Da Lat and are still there. Only six of the province's 16 Revolutionary Development teams are in place in their appointed hamlets, and many of the remainder are unaccounted for. No significant attacks occurred in rural Tuyen Duc until the Viet Cong had withdrawn from Da Lat, at which time Revolutionary Development hamlets in each district were hit. Small groups of Communist troops have now returned to the outskirts of the city, but the Vietnamese Army has made no moves to oust them, even though its forces outnumber the enemy's and have been assured of adequate air and artillery support.

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5. In Binh Long Province, reports from residents of An Loc and Loc Ninh districts indicate that the Viet Cong are gaining a firm foothold. They have been expanding their administrative control and mobilizing the population in many hamlets. Residents report that the Viet Cong are firmly entrenched in many hamlets. Destruction of government identity cards by the enemy has reportedly become so standard that the people automatically produce their cards when the Viet Cong appear.

6. In Phu Yen Province, government forces, which had been deployed in and around Tuy Hoa to defend the city against the Viet Cong attacks, have now been moved back out to the rural areas. They have been reluctant however, to patrol at night or to set ambushes. They move instead in company strength from one strongpoint to another, and operations even during daylight hours have been largely confined to Revolutionary Development hamlets instead of being extended to more insecure areas. Revolutionary Development teams, almost all of which have been back in their assigned hamlets since 15 February, feel so unprotected that many will not spend the night in the hamlets. The Viet Cong have been relatively free to operate at night in platoon strength and reportedly have been taxing villagers, confiscating rice, and recruiting.

Defections to the Viet Cong

7. Although no major government military unit is believed to have defected to the Viet Cong since 30 January, numbers of South Vietnamese Government personnel are believed to have individually joined them. Evidence of this is most readily available in Hue.

8. South Vietnamese Government authorities have discovered that at least 25 individuals--company grade military officers, noncommissioned officers, civil servants, and policemen--defected to the Communists in Hue. This may be an extreme case, since Hue has long been a hotbed of antigovernment dissension and was the center of the abortive "struggle" movement in the spring of 1966. Moreover, the Communists controlled parts of Hue far longer than was the case in any other city attacked at Tet.

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9. Most of the civilian defectors in Hue, according to the Vietnamese information, were associated with "extremist struggle elements" in the past. Some of these people apparently were recently released from government prisons.

10. Most of the military defectors in Hue were assigned the mission of propagandizing other soldiers and civil servants to surrender and cooperate with the Viet Cong. One group was charged with writing letters to members of the Vietnamese 1st Division, urging them to leave their unit.

11. The number of defections elsewhere in the country, especially among government forces located outside of cities and towns, cannot be accurately assessed. The large number of rural outposts overrun or abandoned--including at least a few through treachery--suggests that this kind of thing may have occurred elsewhere.

12. Recent Communist propaganda claiming defections from the government forces has provided explicit unit designations and the number of personnel--in many cases no more than four or five alleged defectors. For example, a Liberation Radio broadcast of 24 February claimed that a majority of the officers and troops from the Vietnamese 45th Regiment (23rd Division) joined with the "liberation forces" to attack and take over Ban Me Thuot. Although this is known to be an exaggeration since the unit as a whole fought the enemy attack, reports from US and Vietnamese officials did suggest that at least some members of the 45th Regiment assisted the Communists. Since "troop proselyting" has always received heavy emphasis from the Communists, it is not possible to determine at present whether the apparent defections were spontaneous or were in fact enemy "agents in place."

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. The evidence clearly indicates that the infiltration of personnel from North to South Vietnam has continued at a high rate since the first of the year. Infiltration has probably been above the 1967 monthly average of 4,000 to 6,000 men.

2. The bulk of the infiltrators appears to have been replacements or reinforcements for existing units. Reports from prisoners and agents suggest that significant replacement and augmentation groups arrived in January. [redacted]

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[redacted] also reflect the influx of replacement personnel. For example, [redacted] mid-February referred to replacements for the 27th Independent Battalion and 803rd North Vietnamese Army Regiment in Quang Tri Province.

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3. It is possible that new organic North Vietnamese units have infiltrated, although there is no firm evidence of this. [redacted]

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[redacted] the 316th Division probably has deployed out of North Vietnam, but its destination is unclear at this time. Captives recently taken in the Demilitarized Zone area have stated that new divisions, including the 308th, have moved into this area. This information has not been corroborated.

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4. [redacted]

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5. The Communists, in planning the Tet offensive, are likely to have made provisions for replacing large numbers of troops they probably expected to lose or for exploiting any advantage gained from the offensive.

6. As in the past, it will be some months before a firm assessment can be made of the pace of infiltration during the past eight weeks. There is normally a time lag of three to six months.

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