

Chapter 9 – (U) The Last Ramparts of Our Conceits: The DGTS, American SIGINT, and the Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-1975

(U) On 28 January 1973, the Paris Peace Agreement was signed and the American phase of the Indochina War officially ended. It had been a long and frustrating road to the agreement. It had taken a final air blitz by the United States to force the final signatures to the paper. Yet, after all of that, it remained an accord that satisfied no one.

(U) Back in August 1972, Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's national security adviser, entered into a series of talks with the chief North Vietnamese negotiator, Le Duc Tho, in Paris. Between stops in Paris, Kissinger would fly to Saigon to try to convince President Thieu to accept whatever deal he could cut with Tho. In early October, mostly on his own and without Nixon's approval, Kissinger had hammered out an agreement with Tho. It contained a cease-fire for Vietnam, but not for Laos or Cambodia, and called for the return of prisoners from both sides. The United States agreed to pull all of its remaining troops out of Vietnam. However, the North Vietnamese could keep their troops in South Vietnam, and agreed to not reinforce them. This was Washington's major concession to Hanoi. In turn, Hanoi agreed to allow President Thieu to continue to rule in Saigon. However, Thieu had to acknowledge the communist National

Liberation Front as a legitimate political entity in South Vietnam, as well as join the front in exploring the means to form a coalition government.

(U) Kissinger traveled to Saigon to show Thieu the agreement that he and Tho had arranged. Thieu was shocked by the provision which allowed Hanoi to keep its troops in South Vietnam. "This is not what we expected," Thieu said, and refused to join in the agreement. Nixon had told Kissinger that Saigon had to approve the settlement and could not be forced into accepting it.¹

(U) In October, Kissinger had just returned to Washington when he heard that Hanoi radio had announced the terms it had accepted. Concerned over Saigon's recalcitrance, the national security adviser went ahead and held a news conference in which he announced "that peace was at hand." He seemed to be telling Hanoi that he remained



(U) President Richard Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger

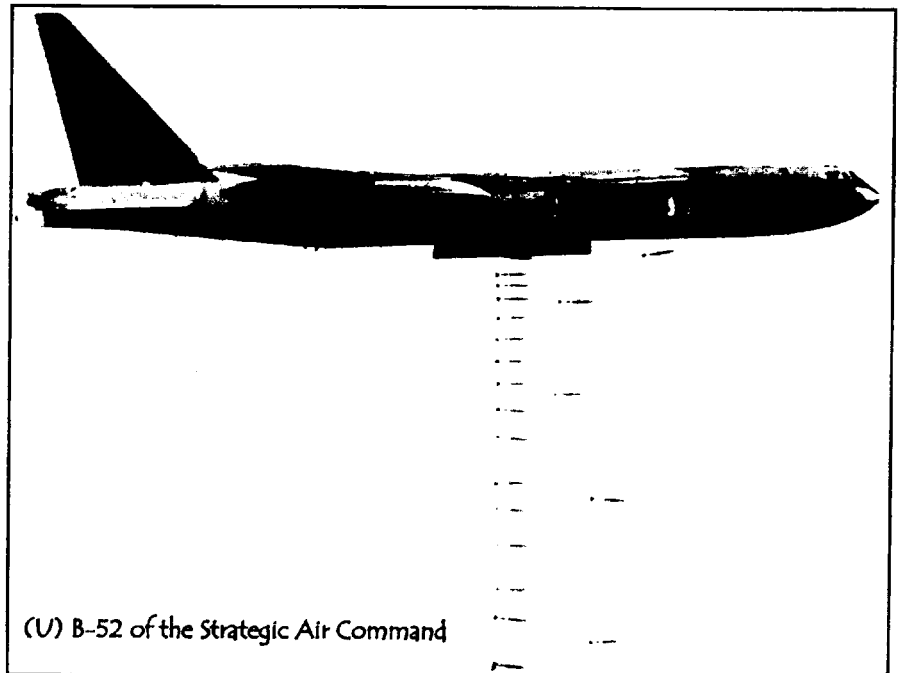
committed to the terms he had drafted with Tho. Kissinger wanted Thieu to understand that he could not subvert the agreement.² President Nixon seemed undecided whether to push for an early conclusion to the agreement. His thinking on the matter may have been dominated by the upcoming presidential elections and the related concern over the growing Watergate scandal, a growing tumor that would not succumb to any efforts to eradicate it.

(U) After the presidential election, the United States resumed negotiations with both North and South Vietnam. Talks with Thieu produced sixty-nine changes that he wanted to make to the Kissinger-Tho agreement, most of them designed to restrict the political position of the NLF, force PAVN troops out of South Vietnam, guarantee respect for the demilitarized zone, and restrict the makeup of an international conference on the peace. The United States promised Thieu more aid and the possibility of bombing the North if the latter failed to adhere to the agreement. However, Nixon warned Thieu that, if Saigon wanted to be an obstacle to peace, then he would be forced to consider other alternatives.³ This included the possibility that the United States might decide to "go it alone" and cut a deal with Hanoi for the return of American prisoners. Nixon and Kissinger both warned Thieu that Congress had lost the stomach for the war and when it reconvened in January it just might cut off all aid.

(U) Kissinger flew to Paris and offered these changes to Tho. The North Vietnamese representative rejected

Saigon's demands and insisted that the United States stick to the agreement signed in the previous October. In fact, Tho demanded more stringent conditions on a postwar advisory effort that could have eliminated all such support. An impasse had been reached and the administration was split over whom to blame, Hanoi or Saigon; some officials believed that Kissinger was causing the deadlock.⁴

(U) After talks in Paris broke off, Kissinger returned to Washington. Although he claimed that the talks had not broken down, in truth there had been virtually no progress concerning the sixty-nine changes demanded by Saigon. In mid-December 1972, the administration decided to renew bombing the North in an operation called Linebacker II. On December 18, waves of B-52 SAC bombers began raids on North Vietnamese cities. Complementary strikes were conducted by tactical Air Force, Navy, and Marine jets. For eleven days, with a one-day halt for Christmas, the Air Force bombers pounded industrial and military installations around all of the North's major cities. The casualty figures for civilians



(U) B-52 of the Strategic Air Command

were greatly exaggerated: about one thousand died in the attacks.⁵ North Vietnamese air defenses, including MiGs, AAA, and SAMs, shot down twenty-six aircraft, fifteen of them B-52s. Ninety-three airmen were killed and another thirty-one were captured. On one day, six of the attacking bombers were shot down. Hanoi fired about 1,200 SAMs at the attacking aircraft.

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT support to Linebacker II was extensive. Six ground intercept sites and four airborne platforms provided coverage of the North Vietnamese air defense network, with the bulk of the effort coming from the Air Force Security Service missions at Ramasun, Thailand, and Clark Air Force Base, Philippines. The tactical, or real-time, reporting of SAM and MiG warnings came across the Teaball and the Red Crown control nets. OPSCOMM, or the informal operator radio teleprinter links, was used to pass other significant intelligence to the cryptologic liaisons attached to the air units.⁶

~~(S//SI)~~ Overall, almost 500 SAM and MiG warnings were passed to the attacking aircraft. The MiG warnings, provided by the Teaball system, proved the most useful, giving azimuth, range, altitude, and the number of North Vietnamese aircraft. The biggest beneficiaries were the tactical aircraft; the North Vietnamese MiGs only occasionally attacked the B-52s, although the big aircraft actually shot down two MiGs with their radar-guided tail guns. The SAM warnings were not as useful for the big bombers. There was a high concentration of SAM complexes in the Hanoi and Haiphong

areas. When the B-52s approached, the number of SAM alerts often cluttered the air warning frequencies. Also, the North Vietnamese were aware of the American monitoring. On some occasions, they were able to "spoof" the SIGINT system through a combination of deception and emissions control.⁷

(U) The bombing surprised the American public; there had been no advance warning. Congress was still in recess. Unexpectedly, there was little domestic reaction; nothing at all like the reaction to the invasion of Cambodia. Much of the criticism of the bombing came from the American media and foreign sources, such as the Vatican. As for the Americans and Vietnamese, both had reached into their quivers and found they had run out of arrows. The Vietnamese exhausted their missile inventory and by the end of the bombing offensive were virtually defenseless. On the other hand, the United States was paying a heavy price in aircraft and crews. As many as thirty-four additional B-52s had been damaged during the offensive. Senior Air Force officers and President Nixon were concerned over the growing losses of bombers and fatigue among the crew members.⁸



(U) On Guam, a SAC B-52 crew attends a Linebacker II briefing.

The Christmas bombing exposed the political rift that had been developing for some time in the ranks of the U.S. Air Force crews and pilots. In some instances, regular SAC crews refused to fly. Captured pilots were paraded by the Vietnamese before the international press and made statements confirming some of Hanoi's claims. Morale suffered from the unexpectedly high attrition rate of attacking aircraft.⁹

~~(S//SI)~~ The political fissures caused by the Christmas bombing reached into the ranks of the USAFSS personnel at two intercept sites that were providing support to the bombing [redacted]

[redacted] the 6994th at the 7th RRFS in Thailand. At both sites, some Security Service intercept operators began work stoppages to protest the bombing. These stoppages entailed the use of the so-called "nil heard" tactic whereby the intercept operator would claim that he could not hear the transmission of the station he was assigned to copy. Traditionally, the practice, which had achieved something of folklore status among intercept operators of all three cryptologic services, was employed to protest working conditions, whether it be poor food, overbearing supervisors, and so on. However, what happened to the two air force units was something new - the "nil heard" used as political protest.

~~(S//SI)~~ At Udorn, some intercept operators of the 6994th refused to copy North Vietnamese air defense flight tracking messages. At first, army collectors were substituted on the affected intercept positions. This situation lasted for about thirty-six hours until the army base commander ordered the air force squadron leader to get his operators back "on rack." No official judicial action was known to have been carried out against the air force operators who had struck, though it is possible that subsequent administrative action against the airmen may have occurred.¹⁰

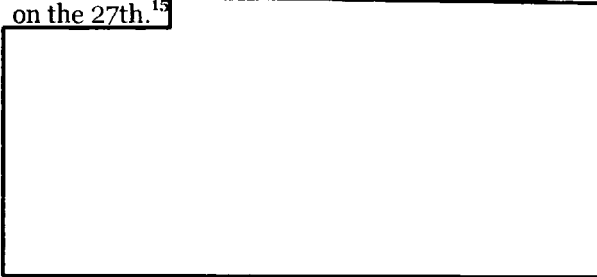
~~(S//SI)~~

~~(S//SI)~~ At the site [redacted] the situation was murkier. According to one source, several airmen at the site were angry over being ordered earlier in the year not to report continued American bombing in the northern regions of North Vietnam despite the Nixon administration's claim that they had ceased.¹¹ When the Christmas bombing began, operators simply refused to copy DRV air defense radio traffic. Most of the striking operators were pulled from their positions and put on menial details. Interviewed shortly afterwards, many of the airmen claimed that there were secret courts martial in Taiwan.¹² Air Force intelligence historians claim that no such incidents occurred.¹³ Most likely, it seems that any action against the airmen was handled at the local command level and may have never been registered at the next echelon of command. Still, the oral testimony concerning the work stoppages and slowdowns is compelling enough to suggest that there were disciplinary and morale problems in the AFSS arising from the Christmas bombings.

~~(TS//SI)~~ On the evening of 26 December, Hanoi signalled that it was ready to resume talks in early January. The bombing ended on 30 December, and talks started back up on 3 January 1973. Relatively early in the negotiations, perhaps by 9 January, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho had reached a new agreement. Contrary to claims by Nixon, Kissinger, the United States Air Force, and friendly press and historians that the Christmas bombing had forced Hanoi to sign the agreement, in fact very little had changed from what had been negotiated back in October. Although the South Vietnamese had still held out for withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from their country, this objection was not addressed. Instead, Kissinger and Tho discussed only the protocols for signing the agreement and some minor modifications to the wording concerning the status of the DMZ. In this latter case, a phrase for mutual respect for the status of the DMZ and movements across it were discussed. Tho agreed that there would be no movement of troops through the DMZ

and that no military forces would be stationed there either.¹⁴

~~(TS//SI)~~ Despite Thieu's objections, the Americans put pressure on him to accept the agreement. This pressure came from several quarters. Nixon dispatched Alexander Haig to Saigon with a letter which informed Thieu that he would initial the accord on 23 January and sign in on the 27th.¹⁵



(U) On 23 January, Kissinger and Tho initialed the accords and on 27 January, Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Le Duc Tho signed them. The accords declared a cease-fire throughout Vietnam. Prisoners of war would be exchanged within sixty days of the agreement (though notification and exchange of lists of prisoners would occur within fifteen days of signing the agreement). The United States agreed to

remove the last of its troops within sixty days of the return of its prisoners. The North Vietnamese were not required to pull their troops out, but they promised not to "take advantage" of the situation, though they could replace those troops already there (a point that the United States felt meant no more troops to be sent to South Vietnam). An International Commission for the Supervision and Control of the Cease-fire was created and was to move into the quarters soon to be vacated by MACV. On 29 March 1973, the last United States soldiers left Vietnam. Now only Saigon and Hanoi remained to decide the fate of Vietnam.

(U) The first two years of the cease-fire that followed the Paris Peace Agreement saw a shift in fortunes as Saigon first managed to push the communist forces and political cadre from a number of villages and provinces that they had held since the general offensive of early 1972. Thieu had adopted a strict policy of refusing to concede anything to the communists. This was known as his "Four No's": no negotiations with the enemy, no communist activity south of the DMZ, no coalition government, and no surrender of territory to the North or the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Knowing that aid from Washington was at the mercy of a skeptical and war-weary Congress, he ordered his troops to go on the attack and strike at communist positions wherever possible.



(U) Henry Kissinger (background) and Le Duc Tho (center, foreground, back to camera), initial Paris Peace Agreement, 23 January 1973.

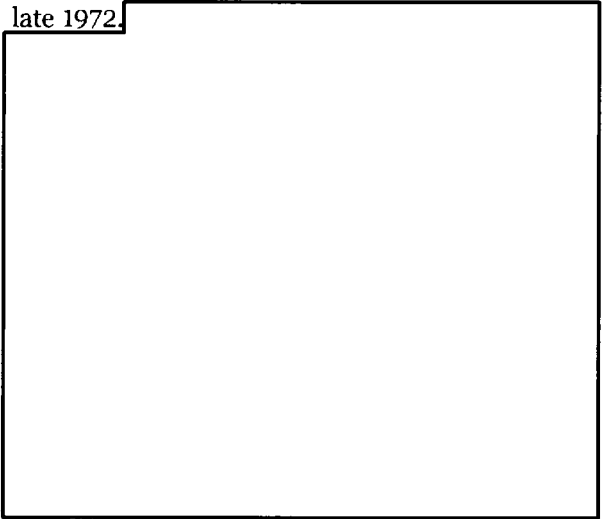
(U) In Hanoi, the leadership's reaction to Thieu's offensive was, at first, indecisive. Hanoi had recognized that its forces in the South were weary and needed to recuperate. Also, aid from the PRC and the Soviet Union had

slackened, as both countries sought to improve relations with the United States.¹⁷ Pressed, the North Vietnamese fought to hold supply lines open, but otherwise adopted an approach known as the "Five Forbids": their forces were forbidden to attack the enemy; to attack enemy troops carrying out land grab operations; to surround enemy outposts; to shell outposts; to build combat villages.¹⁸

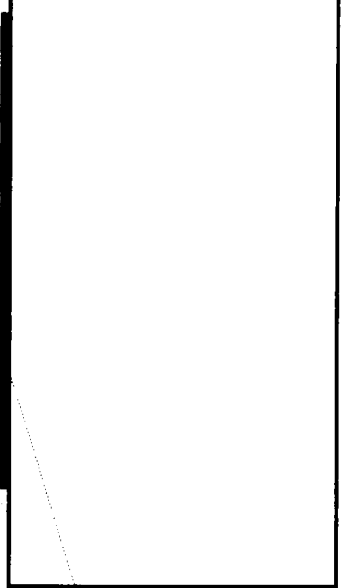
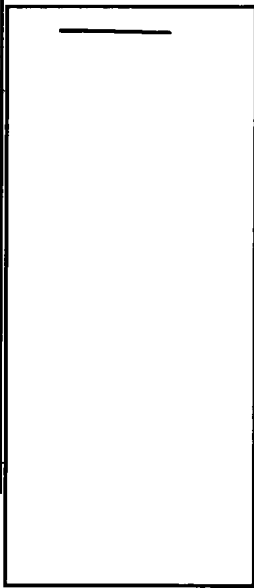
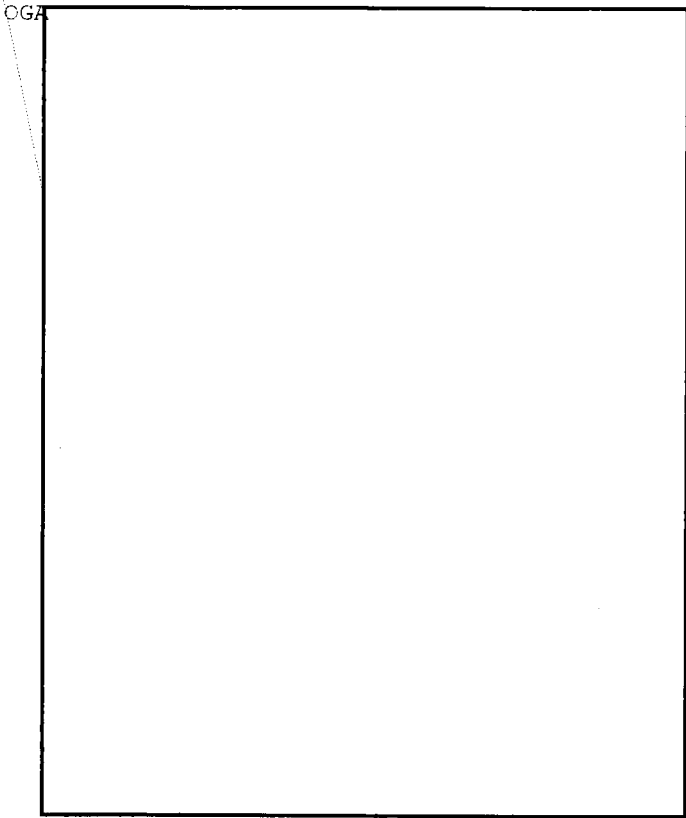
(U) Southern communist commanders were angry with Hanoi's strictures, and many continued to battle Saigon's troops for territory. Both sides violated the cease-fire agreement, and the casualties piled up. Some 100,000 NVA and PRG troops died in the first two years of the cease-fire, while 56,500 ARVN troops perished. There were 85,000 civilian casualties. Another 800,000 became refugees, adding to the extraordinary number already staying in camps.

~~(S//SI)~~ **Going It Alone: The DGTS after the Paris Peace Agreement to the Fall of Saigon, 1973-1975**

~~(S//SI)~~ In early 1973, the last two U.S. SIGINT sites in Vietnam, the venerable ASA missions at Phu Bai and the air base at Bien Hoa, were scheduled to be completely closed. In truth, though, they had been functionally inactive since late 1972.



NSA maintained its liaison with the Vietnamese SIGINT organization, which itself had been renamed, for the last time as it happened, as the Directorate General for Technical Security (DGTS).²¹



sory contingent exempted from the protocols of the Peace Agreement which put a ceiling on military personnel levels. [redacted]

[redacted] since the SSTB was under the Vietnamese JGS, and a military organization, the size of the NSA technical support staff could be construed as a violation of military advisory personnel levels. [redacted] solution: put the SSTB under civilian control.²²

(TS//SI) [redacted] had been attempting this tack for almost five years, but Thieu had demurred on several occasions, citing a lack of funds and the exigencies of the war.²³ Everyone agreed it was a "paper" transfer, one designed to get around the protocols of the Paris Peace Agreement.

(TS//SI) On the evening of 25 January, the U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker [redacted] met separately with President Thieu, his presidential advisor, Lieutenant General Quang, and General Vien, the chief of the Vietnamese general staff. All agreed to the transfer of the SSTB to the President's Office. Four days later, on 30 January, Thieu's Presidential Decree Number 55 established the DGTS as a national-level SIGINT organization for South Vietnam.²⁴

(S//SI) By March 1973, except for the staff of technical advisors belonging to the NRV, Vietnamese signals intelligence personnel now found themselves truly alone for the first time in twelve years. There were no more American cryptologists manning any field sites or performing any analysis or reporting. Nor were the large numbers of advisors at the technical centers to ease the transition to sole Vietnamese operations. Now, there was only a handful of civilian advisors spread around the four technical centers and a large staff in Saigon. The DGTS now had to implement what it had been force-fed in the last three years.

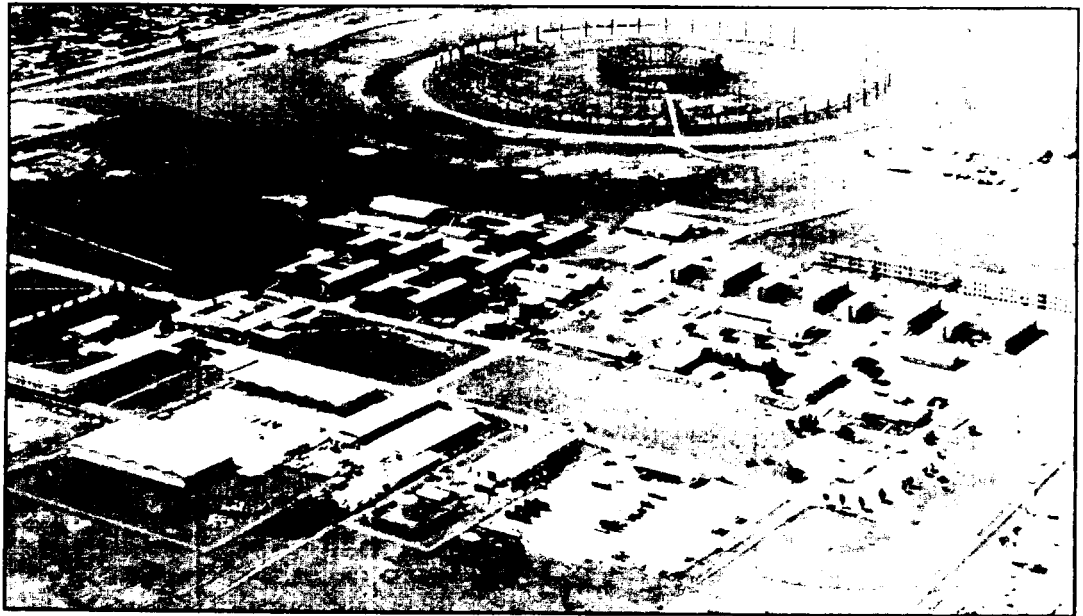
(S//SI) The American outlook on the future of the DGTS was, at best, guarded. Although the Vietnamese had made much progress in collection of communist manual Morse and tactical voice communications, along with some headway in analysis and reporting, they still had much to do. This was especially true in regards to meeting personnel manning levels, making its ARDF assets effective, and ensuring adequate crypto-security of all of Saigon's military communications systems and networks.²⁵

(S//SI) Whether the directorate, in its short life span, actually succeeded in meeting its major role of supporting the South Vietnamese leadership with useful communications intelligence, again, is a matter of perspective. [redacted]

[redacted] described the types of reports that were passed to the Vietnamese national leadership. A daily "Tactical COMINT Report" was given to ARVN Corps and Division staffs, as well as supposedly to the Vietnamese Navy and Air Force Headquarters. Other unspecified reports and information were passed to President Thieu and other leaders.²⁶ However, to American advisors in Saigon and evaluators from Fort Meade, it still remained unclear, after all this time, what kinds of intelligence were being disseminated and who in the Vietnamese command structure was actually receiving the information.²⁷

(TS//SI) By the completion of the American withdrawal in early 1973, it was clear that the SIGINT needs and posture of the United States had changed as well. Likewise, the role that South Vietnamese COMINT, as part of the new American SIGINT plan for Southeast Asia, had undergone a major revision. [redacted]

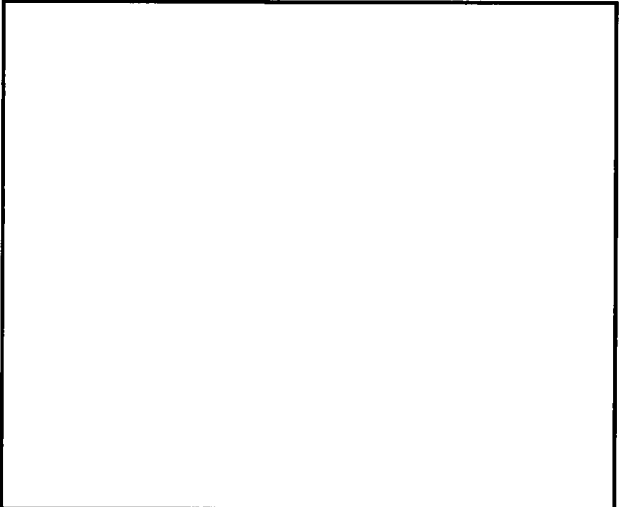
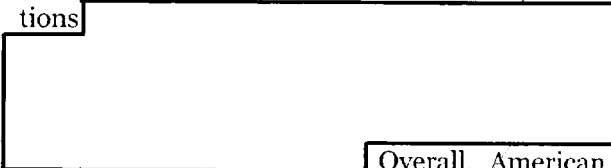
[redacted] The political-military situation in Southeast Asia was reduced in prior-



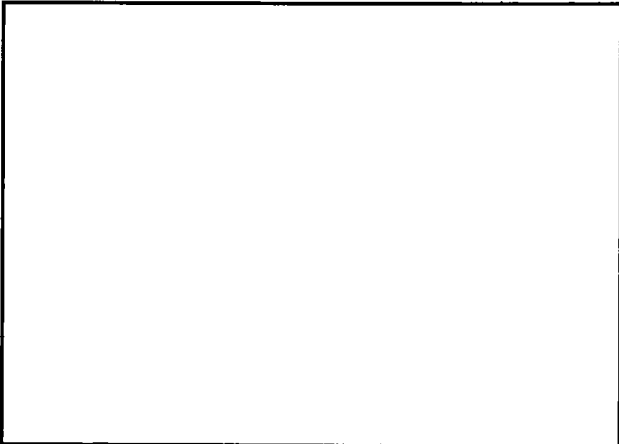
(U) 7th
RRFS,
Ramasun,
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ity; interest centered on monitoring adherence to the Paris Peace Agreement.²⁸

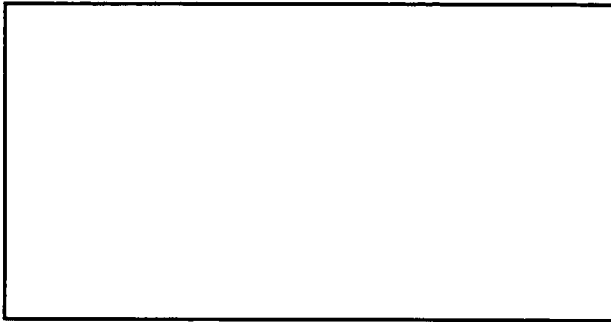
~~(TS//SI)~~ The axis of the American SIGINT effort in Southeast Asia had gravitated west to the 7th Radio Research Field Station (7th RRFS) at Ramasun just south of the provincial capital of Udorn, Thailand. The 7th RRFS was the last major U.S. SIGINT site on the Southeast Asian landmass. There were two associated D/F stations



Overall, American SIGINT assets devoted to Southeast Asian communications were declining. Collection positions allocated to intercept the communications in the region declined; as measured as a percentage of the worldwide cryptologic program, they had dropped from 13 to 5 percent. The Southeast Asia analytic effort at NSA was "virtually eliminated" as a result of economies forced by cutbacks on the entire intelligence community that followed the cessation of the direct American military involvement.²⁹



EO 1.4.(c)



intelligence would America gain in view of the potential loss of continuity should the knowledge of our exploitation of the PAVN and VC callsign systems reach Hanoi. In the lines of dispute over what to give Saigon, there was a strong echo of Washington's traditional concern over South Vietnamese security practices and efficiency.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, even the U.S. SIGINT effort in Thailand was under scrutiny for a possible cut-back. In September 1973, the director, NSA, proposed a near one-third reduction in the number of cryptologic personnel in Thailand. He also suggested that a number of programs be ended, including some ARDF programs, and that the intercept missions by the 7th RRFs directed against North Vietnamese military communications along the South Vietnamese borders



All of these changes were in accordance with the new strategic thinking of the Nixon administration.

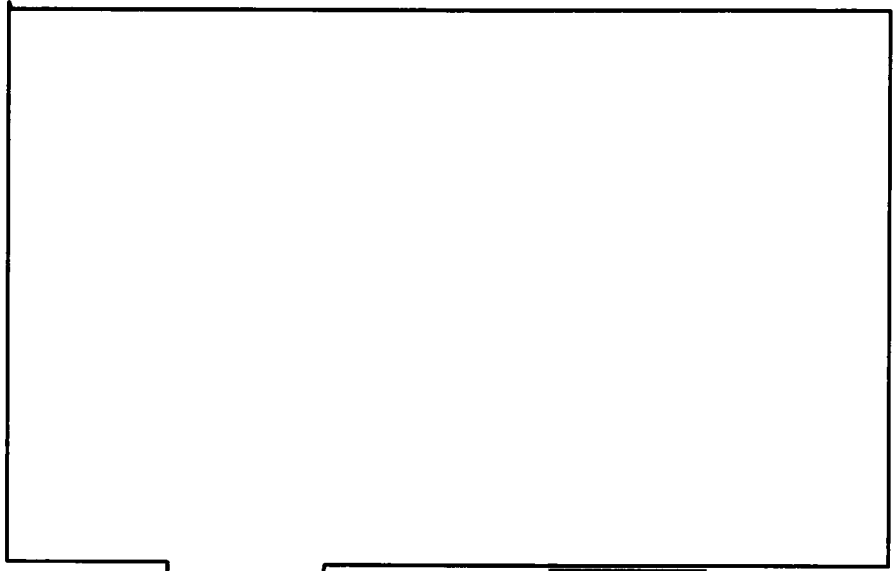
~~(TS//SI)~~ For NSA (and American intelligence in general), the DGTS had become the primary source for COMINT on communist activity around South Vietnam's border region. This heavier reliance on the DGTS forced the American cryptologic leadership again to wrestle with the question of raising the level of the technical exchange and training for the Vietnamese. This issue had come up in 1972 during discussions of whether to give the South Vietnamese the ability to collect out-of-country DRV military communications by supplying them with predicts of daily-changing callsigns of the entire North Vietnamese military. The arguments in Fort Meade were not so much about the ability of Saigon's cryptologists to handle the technical material; rather, the true issue was how much

~~(S//SI)~~ The final decision on the callsigns was termed the "short-term, middle solution." First, NSA would supply limited technical support, that is, five or ten days' worth of callsigns, without revealing the extent of our exploitation. Second, NSA would "explain" to the Vietnamese the extent of the out-of-country problem so that they could plan future resources and technical levels.³⁴ This solution was a reflection of NSA's traditional reservations about the ability of Vietnamese signals intelligence to cope with the new technical data, as well as the residual fear of compromise of sensitive cryptologic source information to Hanoi.³⁵

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ It is not certain how the Vietnamese reacted to this sort of "quick peek" technical exchange policy. However, a sense of Vietnamese frustration was evident when [redacted] came to Washington in May 1973 for meetings with CIA and NSA personnel. During his visit, [redacted] stressed his often-stated belief that the DGTS needed to develop a "strategic radio intercept system," which would allow him to monitor North Vietnamese military communications outside South Vietnam's border regions, especially in Laos and North Vietnam. He also wanted to be able to cover communist air force, air defense, navy and logistics (principally the GDRS in Cambodia) elements, all of which the DGTS currently was unable to do.³⁶ To accomplish this, [redacted] needed specialized signal equipment and training, especially computer training.

~~(S//SI)~~ NSA's response [redacted] was to offer him a weekly SIGINT summary derived from U.S. product. It would be limited to SECRET, Non-codeword, Category II material, but, at the same



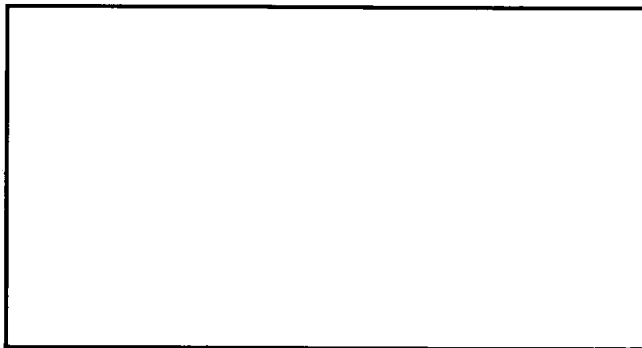
ed in the northern areas of South Vietnam. This series bore a superficial resemblance to the NSA report series titled, "Current Status of Strategic NVA Ground Forces," which was based largely on DGTS intercept. The NSA-supplied summaries continued to be transmitted to the DGTS until the fall of Saigon in April of 1975.

(U) [redacted] in 1973 meeting with [redacted] former NSA Representative in Saigon (at left), and Jack Harney, the commandant of the National Cryptologic School (at right)

(S//SI) [redacted] raised another issue at the meetings in Washington, one which, by itself, symbolized the gap in perception between the Americans

EO 1.4.(c)

P.L. 86-36



and Nhon over what the DGTS could and could not do - that was the idea of developing an in-house computer capability for the DGTS. [redacted] specifically wanted both an enhanced processing of intercept and a database management system. In September 1973, a team of NSA personnel from the Southeast Asia target division, the computer processing group staff, and the security office, flew to Saigon and investigated the proposed DGTS computerization plan. There they were briefed [redacted] that the directorate was planning to use two IBM mainframes (IBM 360-50) which belonged to the ARVN Combined Logistics Command (CLC). Furthermore, [redacted] had wanted to use CLC personnel to run the DGTS program and manage its databases. The NSA team concluded rather easily that this arrangement was totally unsatisfactory from several aspects, but mostly because of security. The Vietnamese had no plans to control access to the computers, and the logistics personnel would remain uncleared for signals intelligence. There was also a concern at Fort Meade that the development of this ADP capability would take

(S//SI) This summary report series, which began in the first week of June 1974, was titled "Secret Communications Intelligence" (*Mat Tinh-Bao Truyen-Tin*). It contained information on North Vietnamese military unit training and command and control communications in the DRV's Military Region IV, which was north of the DMZ. There was information on the infiltration along the sections of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and movement between the *binh trams* in North Vietnam. The summary also carried items on the maritime situation, reporting North Vietnamese tracking of South Vietnamese fishing vessels along its coast. Finally, it contained items on the North Vietnamese air defense forces locat-

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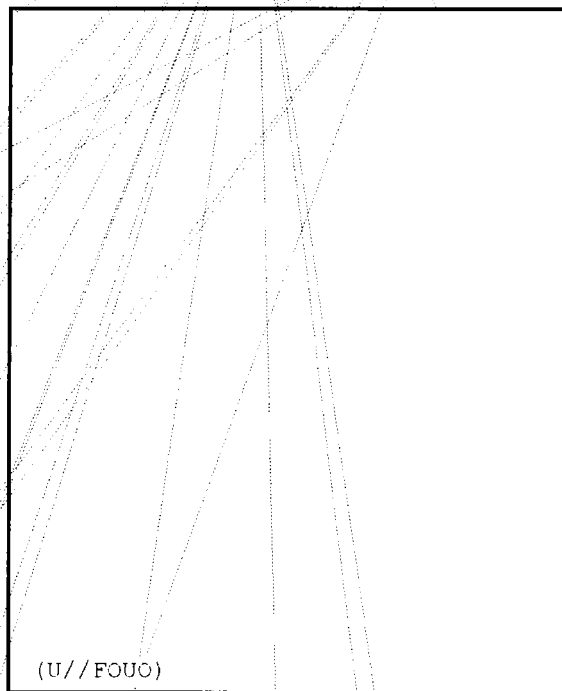
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resources away from current Vietnamese COMINT operations.³⁸

~~(S//SI)~~ Despite the many problems with the ADP development plans, [] refused to be deferred in his quest for a computer capability. In May 1974, he met with the new NSA representative in Saigon, [] and proposed a six-month test of the concept. [] a veteran of the Indochina SIGINT effort from as far back as 1962, and having served in Saigon and in Fort Meade, forcefully tried to convince [] that the test would not prove anything; using computers for SIGINT required specialized training and a technical competency which were beyond the DGTS' current abilities. However, [] persisted and suggested that he send to the United States the head of his cryptanalytic division, [] to study computers. Frustrated by [] single-minded attitude, [] cabled NSA headquarters that NSA should give [] some small assistance and "keep him out of trouble as much as possible."³⁹

~~(S//SI)~~ [] finally did go to the United States to study computers and programming. When he returned, he developed a plan for ADP usage in the DGTS. In the middle of March 1975, as the PAVN divisions were grinding down the ARVN units in the Central Highlands and with barely six weeks left in the life of the DGTS and South Vietnam, [] scheduled a briefing for [] on the new plan. At the heart of the discussion were the same issues as before. [] congratulated [] for a good concept, but reminded them of the problem of the uncleared CLC personnel.⁴⁰

~~(TS//SI)~~ Between the Paris Peace Agreement and the collapse of the Saigon regime, the DGTS never achieved the level of competence that NSA had hoped for back in the beginning of the VIMP. A survey of evaluations from those three years illustrates the difficulties in just getting the Vietnamese to do their job, much less develop a strategic capability as [] wanted to assume.



For example, in January 1973 the NRV reported to Fort Meade on his meeting with []. He described that, when asked to evaluate the competency of his organization, [] declared that the directorate was good at tactical exploitation, but minimally good at strategic communications, namely mainline military communications from Hanoi's military headquarters to COSVN, fronts, divisions, and the separate internal North Vietnamese military ground, air, naval, and civil networks. The NSA representative added that [] could not admit that the latter capability really was nothing more than a "zero."⁴¹

~~(TS//SI)~~ During the same evaluation of his own organization, [] also admitted that the Vietnamese cryptologists would need continuous training and support. As was seen earlier, the original plan for developing the Vietnamese signals intelligence organization had been predicated on an indefinite U.S. cryptologic presence in South Vietnam. Because of the unexpected (and accelerated) drawdown of U.S. forces, and the complete assumption of the fighting by the ARVN combat units, American advice and training had

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~



(U) South Vietnamese learn the basics of intercepting manual morse code with pencil or typewriter.

emphasized tactical COMINT support for the combat units to the detriment of an ability to exploit North Vietnamese strategic and internal communications.⁴²

(S//SI) In June 1973, [redacted] had offered the NRV a grocery list of proposals to improve the DGTS capabilities in the areas he deemed insufficient. These included sending Unit 15 cryptanalysts, including [redacted] to NSA for training. He also agreed to further study the cost of developing a strategic intercept capability. He promised to bring the DGTS inventory of equipment and personnel roster up to requirements outlined in the VIMP. He also agreed that he needed to get DGTS technical COMINT reporting up to standards – the EMRs and TECSUMs that NSA was receiving were often inconsistent.⁴³

(S//SI) In April 1974, another evaluation from the NRV staff in Saigon reported that, within a year of the departure of the ASA DARRs and CARRS teams, and with the reduction of the NSA Special Advisory Team (SAT) to under fifty personnel, DGTS facilities and mission had deteriorated significantly. Many more new problems had surfaced and some old ones had reappeared. Structural and equipment maintenance, especially with the all-important antennas, at all of the sites, whether it was field stations or the small hilltop bunkers manned by the LLVI teams, was especially bad. There were poor applications of intercept and processing techniques and methods. The Vietnamese were still trying to implement the AG-22 intercept and processing system. Overall, but especially at the Saigon Technical Center, there was a lack of sense for timeliness and prioritization in SIGINT reporting. It was noted that the DGTS elements around Saigon headquarters performed generally better;

the farther away, the less effective the Vietnamese cryptologists were. The Americans had told [redacted] of the problems and, in response, he formed inspector general-type teams to do surveys of the field sites and the technical detachments.⁴⁴

(S//SI) In November of the same year, a report from [redacted] mentioned that [redacted] status within the Vietnamese Joint General Staff was "higher than ever before." The DGTS was providing good tactical product to the ARVN divisions through the efforts of the attached ASTDs, and supplemented by the work of the two processing centers at Danang and Pleiku. Yet, the dissemination of intelligence to the national-level departments and leaders remained a mystery to [redacted]. He did not know how COMINT was passed from the DGTS to the various commands in Saigon. He suspected that the system of intelli-



(U) Insufficient for the task. [redacted] Radio operator for the 1st ASTD, outside Hue, RVN

gence dissemination needed improvement, and that [redacted] may have been passing data in an unofficial and irregular manner.⁴⁵

(S//SI) However, for [redacted] and the rest of the DGTS, as well for all of South Vietnam, time was running out. The NSA scenario that called for Vietnamese signals intelligence to develop into an effective source of timely and significant intelligence support for the South Vietnamese leadership was based on the assumption that there would be a sufficient amount of time – a “decent interval” – before the final battle with the North would start. Everyone in Washington had planned for a phased progression: It was hoped that the Vietnamese could incorporate the next level of newer and more sophisticated techniques, methods, and organization, become proficient at them, and then move up to the next phase. Yet, the Vietnamese were unable to accomplish this; there was too much technical information to

absorb with too low and small a base from which to build an acceptable level of expertise.

(S//SI) In January 1975, shortly before the final North Vietnamese offensive, it seemed that progress for the DGTS was still illusory. [redacted] reported that he had met with [redacted] to discuss ways to improve DGTS reporting. “Our gains over the last six months have ranged from modest to transitory,” he reported to the director, NSA, Lieutenant General Lew Allen.⁴⁶ It seemed that the DGTS leadership and analysts could not grasp the SIGINT cycle, and that “thoughtful traffic analysis,” the type that led to useful indications and warning reporting, still was an elusive concept to the Vietnamese. Reporting to national authorities was by word of mouth. [redacted] continued, and [redacted] had not established a formal method or routine to apprise the Saigon leadership of significant intelligence.⁴⁷

(S//SI) Fort Meade saw much the same problem as had [redacted]. On the same day (unbeknownst to each other), DIRNSA issued a new contingency plan for SIGINT in South Vietnam. In this plan, General Allen conceded that the U.S. was largely dependent on the DGTS for COMINT on South Vietnam and its immediate border regions. Although some work was “credible,” the quality of tactical collection was low and not timely; nor was the communication of information to recipients adequate. The thrust of the situation was that neither Thieu nor the American leadership was getting SIGINT information for an accurate assessment of what was going on; nor were there sufficient data for forecasting Hanoi's intentions or moves. DIRNSA offered two solutions: upgrade the DGTS communications system, a project which could take up to nine months to complete, and divert U.S. airborne collection missions to the region to complement Saigon's coverage.⁴⁸

(U) This was another timetable that would be overtaken by events.

(U) Endgame: The Collapse of South Vietnam's Defensive Strategy

~~(S//SI)~~ The North Vietnamese were not allowing South Vietnam any more breathing space. In late 1973, Hanoi's leadership had begun reorganizing the PAVN divisions into a system of corps to allow for more flexible and coordinated operations throughout the south, and especially to facilitate combined arms operations.⁴⁹ The corps structure also freed the PAVN from the control of the military regions. Now combat units could be switched to new areas and missions without losing operational agility. To support the corps, Hanoi formed new cryptographic sections. NSA analysts noted the shift in the new communications structures by December of that year. SIGINT reports noted that three corps organizations existed in the PAVN, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, and that these elements communicated directly with the High Command of the Armed Forces of North Vietnam (HCAFNV) or Hanoi High Command. The NSA analysts also recognized that this reorganization was significant.⁵⁰

(U) On paper, at least, Saigon's forces seemed superior. Although Hanoi had reinforced the PAVN units in the South – there were 400,000 troops there by mid-1974 – Saigon still outnumbered them by a factor of two-to-one. The ARVN could field three times as many artillery pieces as its opponents. The South's air force was one of the largest in the world and was serviced by American contractors. This air power gave the ARVN a certain tactical mobility and ground support dimension that the North lacked.

(U) With the cessation of bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the North had managed to resurface the vehicle-worthy portions of it, giving the system an all-weather capability. In addition, the communist engineers had constructed a gas pipeline which ran along side it. Still, even with the luxury of time and the redone trail, the PAVN forces were seriously short of ammunition and spare parts. Artillery was in short supply. For

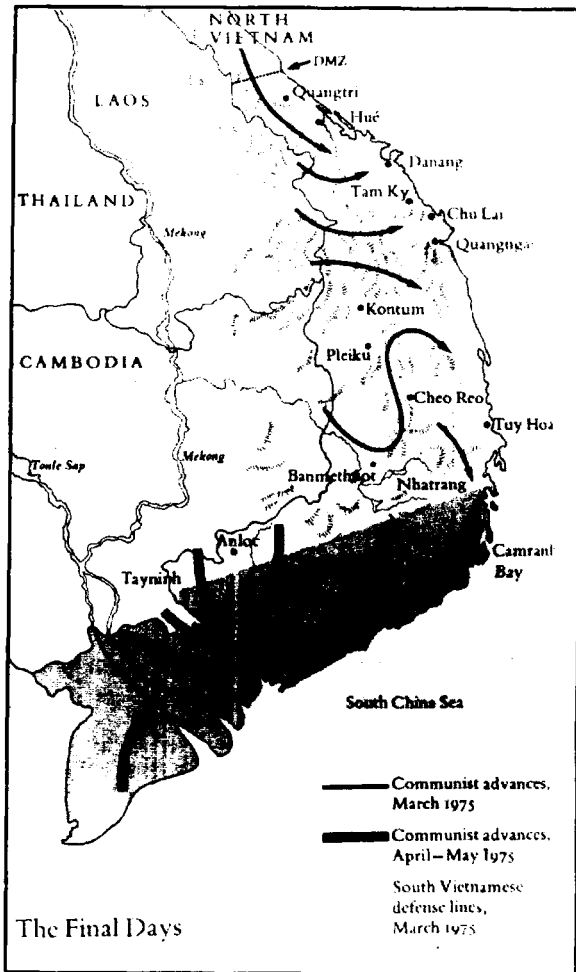
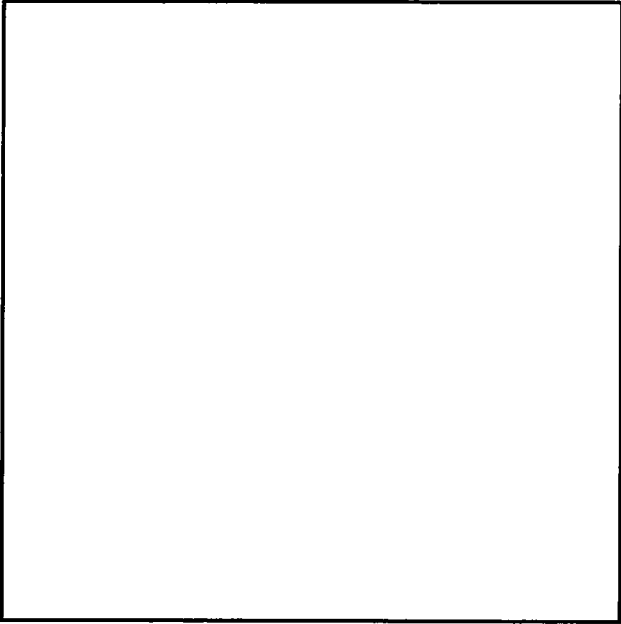
example, seven PAVN infantry divisions were supported with only five battalions of field artillery.⁵¹

(U) The military planners in Hanoi knew that, despite Saigon's preponderance in men and equipment, they held the strategic initiative. While Saigon had twice as many troops, they were tied up in the knot of Thieu's refusal to surrender any territory. This meant that South Vietnamese units were welded to a static defense of the military regions throughout South Vietnam. Little in the way of a strategic reserve existed which could be thrown in to reinforce a threatened area. On the other hand, PAVN units could be moved and concentrated in any area. This flexibility, and Saigon's immobility, was the key to the situation in late 1974. Hanoi could choose when and where to strike. Saigon, despite its numbers and apparent air mobility, could only wait for an attack to occur. Then, Thieu and his generals had to decide if the attack was for real or a feint to tie down his few reserves.

(U) By mid-1974, the communists had devised a plan to attack the center of South Vietnam – the historically strategic Tay Nguyen or Central Highlands region. The designer of the offensive was General Tran Van Tra, who had commanded the shock troops attacking Saigon during the 1968 Tet offensive. He saw an opportunity in the upcoming dry season to pin the ARVN in its cities and take Saigon. He traveled to Hanoi to convince Giap and the other leaders of the chance that was offered to them. Hanoi's generals agreed, but senior politicians such as Le Duc Tho preferred a slow, small-scale campaign.⁵² Eventually, the PAVN high command settled for an offensive in 1975 that would set the stage for a final assault in 1976. Yet, Hanoi's military leaders had allowed themselves the possibility that the "opportune moment" could arrive in 1975, and that they could immediately liberate the South.⁵³

(U) The offensive plan was divided into three phases. The first was a limited offensive in the

deep South near Saigon and would last from December 1974 to February 1975. Phase two, which was the critical element, would start in March with an attack on outposts in the Central Highlands. It would be supported by a number of diversionary attacks in the Saigon region and near the DMZ. There would also be feints in other parts of the highlands designed to create confusion as to the real target. Phase three was to begin in August 1975 and was primarily a consolidation phase during which Saigon's forces would be ground down in preparation for the "strategic opportunity" that was certain to appear late that year.⁵⁴




(U) General course of the final campaign for South Vietnam

(U) When the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in 1973, President Nixon secretly had assured President Thieu that the U.S. would back his country if Hanoi attacked. However, Nixon had resigned over Watergate in August 1974; the current incumbent, President Gerald Ford, could only reassure Thieu of supplies. Congress had, in the meantime, put a limit to the aid to South Vietnam, totalling about 700 million dollars. This figure has been called inadequate by critics of U.S. policy. The truth is the aid proved to be irrelevant to the final outcome: about 40 percent of the aid actually reached Saigon. The remainder was either awaiting shipment or else was unspent (close to half).⁵⁶

(S//SI) Throughout late 1974, SIGINT picked up indications of the North Vietnamese preparations, although these reports covered troop movements in the northern part of South Vietnam and to the west and south of Saigon. Communist activity in the critical Central Highlands, especially the preliminary attacks in late 1974 against outposts protecting the important cities of Pleiku, Ban Me Thout, and Kontum, was only sporadically reported. This gap in reporting probably reflected the limited collection available to the NSA analysts from the DGTS sources and U.S.

sites in the Philippines and Thailand. Some additional coverage was provided by the Olympic Torch flights, which were modified U-2 (TR-2) aircraft that flew intercept missions in the region.

 Operationally, the aerial intercept missions were limited by the duration and number of flights that could be staged. They were also hampered by the lack of continuity of coverage of the communist radio nets. Most reports issued by the mission could do little better than report on the activities of "unidentified units."⁵⁷

~~(S//SI)~~ In December 1974, the PAVN began massing troops around Song Be, the capital of Phuoc Long Province which was about eighty miles north of Saigon. In a series of preliminary attacks, elements of the newly organized PAVN 3rd Division captured the surrounding towns of Duc Phong and Vinh Thien by 16 December.⁵⁸ The capture of two district towns to the north of Song Be, Bu Dang and Bu Na, provided the PAVN units with an unexpected bounty in captured American 105mm howitzers and several thousand rounds of ammunition.

(U) The capture of these four towns effectively closed the overland supply routes to Song Be which now could only be supplied and reinforced by air. Here Saigon's strategic handicaps played a part in determining the outcome of the battle. Thieu authorized only a few battalions of reinforcements to be airlifted in. Supplies and support aircraft had to be stripped from the inventories of the other military regions. The PAVN's final attack began on 30 December. In the battle that continued into January of the next year, the ARVN reinforcements and regional defense forces were crushed. According to one South Vietnamese source, one of the factors in the loss of Song Be was that the communists were able to monitor the ARVN radio communications and knew each move in advance.⁵⁹ Along with the military losses, two of the DGTS' precious LLVI teams were overrun. Twenty South Vietnamese

aircraft were downed by the communists, many with the newly arrived, hand-held SAM, the SA-7 (GRAIL) missile.

(U) For the North Vietnamese planners, the most important finding was that the Americans had remained inert; no formations of B-52s had appeared to hammer the PAVN units, and a carrier task force dispatched to the Gulf of Tonkin at the beginning of the attack had turned back.⁶⁰ The State Department issued a protest on 11 January over this attack, denouncing it as a flagrant violation of the peace accords. However, President Ford, in his State of the Union message on 15 January 1975, made no mention of Vietnam. In a press conference a week later, he said that he could foresee no circumstances in which the United States would reenter the war.⁶¹ President Ford did ask Congress for an additional three hundred million dollars in aid, the amount cut from the previous allocation, but Congress was unwilling to spend money on a cause many of its members, even though they sympathized with Saigon, felt was already lost.⁶²

(U) The capture of the provincial capital of Song Be and the rest of Phuoc Long Province caused the North Vietnamese to reassess their strategy. If Thieu was not going to defend these small outposts and provincial capitals, then the communists could go for bigger targets. The day after Phuoc Long was taken, the Politburo in Hanoi approved the redirection of its attacks in the Central Highlands. Ban Me Thuot was now the objective. There were several good reasons to take this city. It had a population of over 100,000 and was considered the informal "capital" of the Central Highlands region. While the city was headquarters for the ARVN 23rd Infantry Division, it was relatively lightly defended by some battalions of the local Regional Forces and one regiment, the 53rd, of the 23rd Division. The rest of the division's units were spread out in the highlands. It was also a major supply nexus for MR II. The city sat on the strategic Route 14 which was the major north-south connector for

the highlands. It also was the western terminal for Route 21, which ran to the port city of Nha Trang. If Ban Me Thuot could be taken, then all of central South Vietnam would be open to attack; the PAVN could head north and threaten Pleiku and Kontum, or go south towards Saigon. If the PAVN moved east, its units could threaten to cut South Vietnam in half. Finally, the families of the ARVN troopers of the 23rd lived in Ban Me Thuot – the soldiers would not abandon their families. The truth for Saigon was that, if Ban Me Thuot was attacked, it could not afford to ignore the threat.

(U) In January, North Vietnamese began their preparations for the military campaign in the Central Highlands. Four communist divisions, the PAVN 320th, 316th, 968th, and the Viet Cong 10th, moved into positions in the Central Highlands. General Van Tien Dung, who thirty years earlier had commanded a platoon of Viet Minh troops against French forces outside of Hanoi, and currently was the number two commander in the PAVN leadership, arrived in the south to take command. Along with his new command, after a march down the new hardtop version of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, came a team of cryptographers who established a special com-

munications link between Dung and the leadership in Hanoi.⁶³

(U) The communist plan of attack was relatively simple, but daring: the 968th was to move its two remaining regiments out of Laos to near Pleiku and Kontum and initiate operations designed to fix the ARVN command's attention to the threat to that part of the region. Meanwhile, the 10th, 316th, and 320th would concentrate around Ban Me Thuot for an overwhelming strike. The 316th Division, originally stationed in North Vietnam, would travel down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and arrive in the Central Highlands. A number of independent engineer, infantry, artillery, and armored units also were to move into the area. The 316th and VC 10th Divisions would hit the city from the south, while the 320th would slam the door from the north.

(U) The problem for Hanoi was to disguise its intentions enough so that Ban Me Thuot would remain lightly defended until the attack developed. The PAVN commanders knew that the massive troop movements and the logistics needs for the new phase of the offensive could not be easily disguised. So, to protect their preparations, the communists mounted a large-scale deception campaign against South Vietnamese and (by remove) American intelligence. This deception targeted the two strongest components of the ARVN intelligence system: aerial observation and communications intelligence.

(U) The communist plan was twofold: deny South Vietnamese and American SIGINT the ability to determine the identity, movement, and disposition of the major units involved in the Central Highlands operations, and to confuse them as to the true target of their attacks. To achieve this, a strict policy of radio silence was imposed on most of the units. At the same time, the deception portion of the plan called for the transmission of dummy messages by other units to capture the attention of the analysts in Saigon



(U) North Vietnamese general
Van Tien Dung (on left)

and Washington.⁶⁴ The question remains: Did the communist plan succeed?

(U) The success or failure of a deception operation cannot always be measured in terms of the individual aspects of the operation; nor can it be assessed in terms of how many or what portion of the enemy's command and intelligence systems were taken in by the deception. Rather, the final result of the deception plan has to be the gauge by which to call the operation successful or not. For example, the final aim of the deception operations supporting the Normandy landings in June 1944 was to convince the Germans that the actual landings were a feint, and that the real landing was to be at Pas De Calais. The massive German armored forces of the 15th Panzer Army stationed in northern France and Belgium were facing the expected main attack at Pas de Calais. They remained in place long enough for the Allies to gain a foothold in Normandy. In this regard, the deception plan, code named Fortitude, was a success, even though many German military leaders believed the Normandy landing to be the real Allied assault. However, the one leader who ultimately mattered, Adolph Hitler, fell for the deception.⁶⁵ It was his opinion that the Normandy landings were a feint that made the difference in the end.

(S) So, then, was there a similar situation during the communist buildup in the Central Highlands during the months from January to early March 1975? The various parts of Hanoi's deception plan were a mixed bag of success and failure. For example, the PAVN 320th Division moved south from near Pleiku towards Ban Me Thuot. The division left behind its regular radio stations and operators who continued to transmit so as to deceive the DGTS direction finding effort. However, the scheme was in vain as none of the South Vietnamese aerial direction finding aircraft would fly in the area, fearing ground fire and the new hand-held SA-7 threat.⁶⁶ The redeployment of the 320th was compromised by both captured documents and ralliers who told their ARVN

interrogators of the move south. The same happened to the Viet Cong 10th Division which headed north towards Ban Me Thuot.⁶⁷ Other intelligence reports noted that the road system east of Pleiku was threatened by the operations of the PAVN's 3rd Division.⁶⁸

~~(S//SI)~~ However, Allied SIGINT did not do well in discovering what the communist troops were up to. In the NSA reporting of the communist forces' movements, some of which was based on DGTS intercept, there is no mention of the movements of the 10th and 320th Divisions towards Ban Me Thuot. In fact these units went undetected, and were not isolated through signals intelligence until the time that the attack on that city began.⁶⁹ The PAVN 968th Division, which had been tasked to make diversionary moves near Pleiku and Kontum, was detected by the DGTS in the second week of January as two of its regiments crossed from Laos into Vietnam.⁷⁰ Reports of the division's activities continued for the next two months, which was in line with Hanoi's plan. However, the most glaring gap was the failure of Vietnamese and American signals intelligence sources to detect the march of the 316th Division from North Vietnam to the outskirts of Ban Me Thuot. The appearance of this division in the battle was a near complete tactical surprise.⁷¹

~~(S//SI)~~ Based on the information from the captured documents and the communist ralliers, the Vietnamese G-2 of Military region II had correctly assessed Hanoi's main effort against Ban Me Thuot. However, the commander of MR II, Major General Pham Van Phu, believed that the main attack was against Pleiku and that the movement around Ban Me Thuot presaged a secondary attack. Accordingly, Phu left the majority of his forces north around Kontum and Pleiku. It was not until the beginning of March that he sent a regiment, the 53rd, to the outposts around Ban Me Thuot. Accompanying this unit were four LLVI teams from the 23rd ASTD, which were sent to outposts some twenty kilometers away from the city to listen for the approach of the commu-

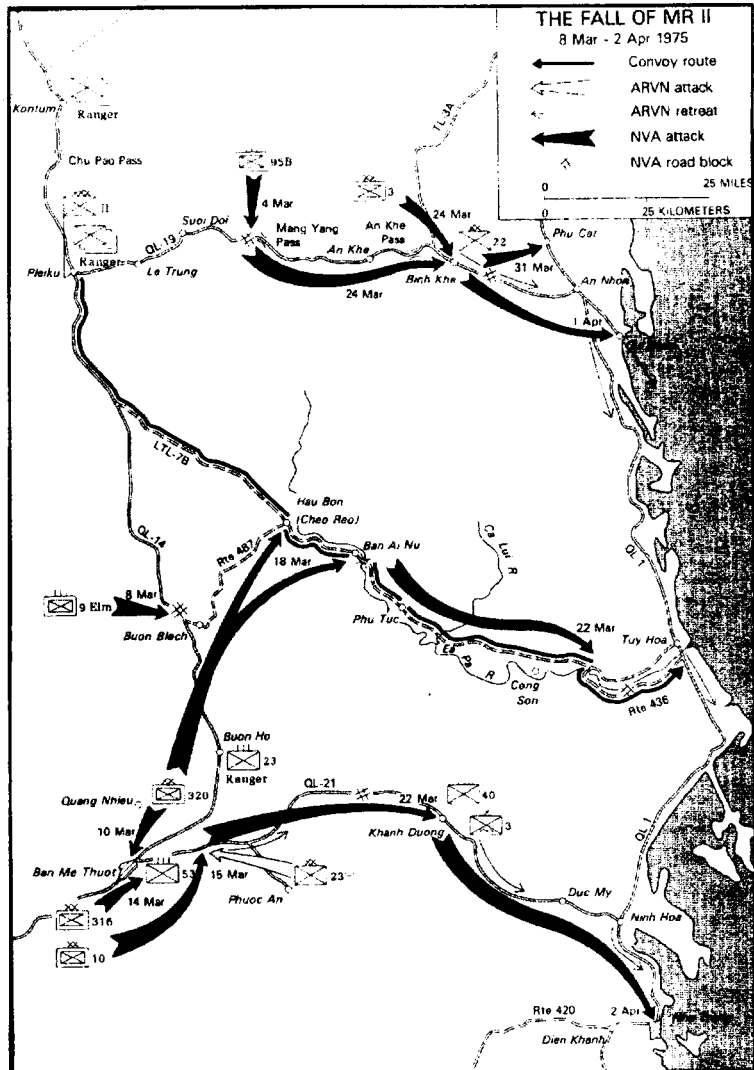
~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

nist units, especially the 10th Division.⁷² These teams would be supported by the Pleiku Technical Center. [redacted] and [redacted] flew to Pleiku on 7 March to inspect the center. The center's poor performance, especially its intercept mission, which met only twenty percent of its objectives, was a real concern to the leadership in Saigon.⁷³

~~(S//SI)~~ Like earlier at Phuc Long, the communist units began to attack outposts near cities all around South Vietnam to further divert attention from the main effort. With the number of attacks being reported from all over the country, Saigon was uncertain where the main thrust was to occur. That question was answered on 10 March when five PAVN infantry regiments, supported by tanks and assault engineer teams, attacked Ban Me Thuot from three directions. After heavy fighting, the city fell on 11 March. Along with the division's deputy commander, the communists seized its communications center, complete with radios, switchboard, cipher equipment and cryptkeys.⁷⁴ Desperate to recover the city, General Phu mounted a counterattack with the remaining regiments of the 23rd Division. Flown in by helicopter, these regiments were hit by the PAVN 10th Division which, along with the 316th, had been awaiting them. The two communist units then proceeded to push the remnants of the ARVN forces eastward.

~~(S//SI)~~ The attack at Ban Me Thuot was a complete success for the communists. Their deception plan had confused the South Vietnamese command as to the real objective; it

reflected the difficult nature of interpreting the confusing intelligence on hand regarding communist intentions. Ralliers and captured documents had seemed to indicate that Ban Me Thuot was the objective. On the other hand, the relative lack of COMINT, except for the intercept of the 968th's messages, had suggested that Pleiku was the target. Another aspect to the success of the communists was their ability to monitor the ARVN communications. PAVN COMINT units listened in on the ARVN as the latter searched for the communist units surrounding Ban Me Thuot.



(U) Campaign in the Central Highlands, Military Region 2, 8 March-2 April 1975

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

Based on this information, Dung ordered more efforts to confuse the ARVN command.⁷⁵ In the end, probably because he lacked convincing intelligence, General Phu's decision to defend Pleiku probably was based on the conventional view that the city had been a traditional communist objective in the past.⁷⁶

(U) The critical stage in the final campaign happened the next day. Thieu met with his generals at the presidential palace in Saigon, and decided to abandon his old strategy of not surrendering any territory. He ordered that troops be transferred from the north to Saigon. He decided that he would trade land for time and consolidate his position to the south, creating a situation of "lightening the top to keep the bottom."⁷⁷ For Thieu, the rich lands of the southern part of the country had to be held.

(U) On 14 March, Thieu met with General Phu at Cam Ranh Bay to discuss what moves to make in the threatened Central Highlands. Thieu wanted to retake Ban Me Thuot, and decided that Pleiku and Kontum could be abandoned; the forces from those two cities could be thrown into the counterattack. It would be a tricky maneuver, requiring the withdrawal of a number of ARVN units in the face of an aggressive enemy with morale soaring after an important victory. Then, these forces would have to redeploy for an attack. Furthermore, the plan was to be carried out in secret; local Regional Forces and provincial leaders were not informed. They would be left behind as a rear guard. Also, the withdrawal from Pleiku would be along an old abandoned logging trail, Route 7B, that was in serious disrepair.

(U) The retreat began on 15 March when the first vehicles left Pleiku. The plan called for a gradual pullout over a four-day period. General Phu, his staff, and their families flew out the same day. The major forces began to leave the next day along with Phu's headquarters. However, the local civilian population saw what was happening. Panic took over and a stream of refugees and

local forces joined the columns moving east. This only added to the confusion and made a mess of any planned rear guard action.

(U) The communists detected the retreat on 16 March, apparently through their own communications intercept of Phu's headquarters move.⁷⁸ Dung ordered his troops to attack the retreating ARVN. The 320th Division wheeled north and headed for Route 7B. The 95th Regiment of the 968th Division headed south. At a roadblock near the town of Cheo Reo, the stalled ARVN convoys came under artillery fire. Hundreds of vehicles were abandoned, and South Vietnamese soldiers and civilians fled for their lives. The withdrawal became a nightmare.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 15 March, the NSA Representative's office in Saigon learned from General [redacted] of the planned retreat from Pleiku. It tried to organize a withdrawal of the Pleiku Technical Center (PTC). To compensate for the loss of the intercept coverage, the NRV reassigned Pleiku's mission to the ASA site at Udorn, Thailand, and the RC-135 airborne intercept platform. Most of the center's equipment was flown out before the airfield outside of Pleiku was shut down by communist fire, but the majority of the personnel were trapped on the ground and had to accompany the retreating ARVN columns. Along with the other refugees, they would be caught in the ensuing roadblocks and ambushes set up by the PAVN troops. In a desperate move, the Vietnamese commander of the Pleiku Technical Center, a [redacted] flew in a plane over the retreating columns hoping to find any of his people. Reportedly, the PTC personnel who were on the tail end of the fleeing convoy, were overrun, but no one knew for sure.⁷⁹ The NSA civilian technical representative at Pleiku barely escaped the disaster, having been previously ordered out by [redacted]⁸⁰

~~(S//SI)~~ Stories from survivors of the harrowing trek from Pleiku to the temporary safety of the coast made for depressing reading. One officer



(U) A panicked convoy stalled on Route 21 east of Ban Me Thuot

from the Center detailed a twelve-day struggle through the jungle and marshlands of the coast before he reached Nha Trang. He personally witnessed the capture of some of the Pleiku Center's officers and their dependents by PAVN units.⁸¹ By the end of March, little more than half of the personnel from the Pleiku Center eventually made it out to the "safety" of the coast.⁸²

made. Thieu intervened and ordered two divisions to be transferred to Saigon for the southern defense plan. Quang Tri and Chu Lai were abandoned. The planned bastion defense of Hue collapsed when new orders from Saigon designated Danang as the enclave to be defended. The ARVN divisions trying to reach Danang for the evacuation to the south were cut off by PAVN units. The

(U) In the northern provinces of South Vietnam, the communist forces also pressed their attacks. In MR I, five PAVN divisions pushed defending ARVN units back into coastal positions in the cities of Hue, Danang, Quang Tri, and Chu Lai. Since these were port cities and could be supplied by sea, it was hoped that they could be turned into bastions. However, the final defense of all these cities would not be



(U) Refugees boarding a ship in Danang harbor

ARVN 3rd Division, charged with the city's defense, collapsed from the onslaught of the PAVN artillery and the wave of refugees. The city became a mob scene with gangs of ARVN troops running wild. Troops shot their way onto evacuation ships and aircraft trying to take off.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 26 March, the NSA technical advisor to the Danang Technical Center was ordered out of the city by the CIA station chief. He abandoned his personnel belongings and managed to jam into one of the last commercial flights out of the city.⁸³ Some Americans from the NRV office had flown in and organized an aerial evacuation of the Danang Technical Center. In scene as dramatic as any in South Vietnam at the time, while the Americans were loading the two cargo planes with pallets of equipment salvaged from the center, they were confronted by their Vietnamese opposites who begged the Americans to take their families on the planes instead of them. Both the Americans and Vietnamese cryptologists, in tears, realized that this would be the last time they probably would see each other. Laden with receivers, mill typewriters, women, and children, the aircraft escaped to Saigon, a haven for only a moment.⁸⁴ Later photoreconnaissance of the Danang airfield showed that the Danang Technical Center had been totally destroyed by the DGTS personnel.⁸⁵

(U) With the capture of the coastal cities in the northern military regions, there was a lull in the fighting as Hanoi redeployed its forces southward for the final battle of Saigon. Unlike in 1972, when PAVN forces seemed uncertain and tentative in their moves after their initial successes, this time there would be no hesitation. A week before Danang fell, Hanoi radioed Dung that the situation had changed and that he had to take Saigon before the monsoon rains began in May. At his headquarters near Loc Ninh, Dung was joined by Le Duc Tho, Pham Hung, and General Tra. Together, they planned the final phase of the war, named the Ho Chi Minh campaign. Speed was of the essence. Uncharacteristically, Hanoi's

leadership threw caution out the door. In the words of the 7 April message from Giap to all of the PAVN units, the troops were to take advantage of the situation and be "reckless" and "like lightning."⁸⁶ There would be no repeat of the 1972 defeat. Yet, before the final battle could begin, attention focused on events in Cambodia. What finally happened there would be a preview for the end in Saigon.

(U) Prelude to the Killing Fields: The Fall of Phnom Penh

(U) Ever since the coup in 1970 that had overthrown Prince Sihanouk and installed Lon Nol as head of the country, Cambodia's military and political fortunes had been a downward curve. The small Cambodian army had grown from 68,000 troops in 1970 to about 200,000 in 1971. However, this expansion was illusory. The Cambodian forces found themselves battling regular Vietnamese units and the insurgent communist forces of the Cambodian Peoples National Liberation Forces (CPNLF), of which the Khmer Rouge were the dominant element. Within a year, the Cambodian forces, known as the FANK (*Forces Armee Nationales Khmeres*), had been driven from the northeastern, southern, and southwestern parts of the country. The large and ambitious government military campaigns in 1971 to break the CPNLF hold in those parts of the country had ended in failure. Slowly, the communist forces squeezed Nol's troops out of most of Cambodia, reducing their hold to a narrow strip of land along the center of the country. American military support consisted of massive B-52 raids against suspected CPNLF positions. Better than a half-million tons of bombs were dropped in the contested areas, which also were often heavily populated. Whether this air campaign was effective or not remains a matter of controversy.⁸⁷

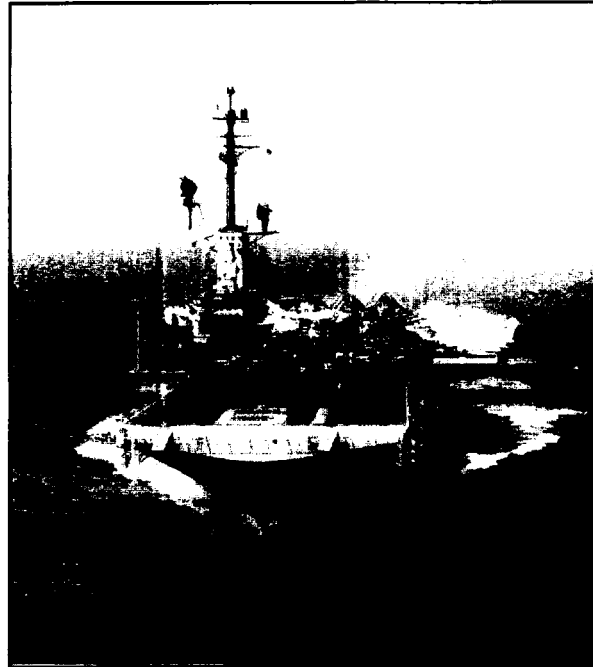
~~(S//SI)~~ The American mission at the embassy totalled about 140 people who oversaw logistics support to the FANK, and representatives from the various intelligence organizations. The staff

operated under a veteran and capable ambassador, John Gunther Dean. Every morning there would be intelligence briefings from all sources, including SIGINT. A staff of five made up the Staff Security Office (SSO) that relayed the SIGINT reporting on the daily situation in Cambodia. The bulk of the intercept came from the ASA site at Udorn, Thailand, and some airborne intercept

[redacted] Since all of the Khmer Rouge cryptographic systems could be read, there was little that the embassy was not aware of. Some of the tactical information gleaned from the SIGINT was passed, in a sanitized format, to the local Cambodian commanders, though their ability to capitalize on it was virtually nil.⁸⁸

~~(S//SI)~~ For example, in late December 1974 the Khmer Rouge were making preparations for the dry-season offensive to take Phnom Penh. SIGINT reporting tipped off the SSO that the attack near Phnom Penh would begin on New Year's Day. The FANK command was notified, and armored cavalry units from the countryside were redeployed to meet the attack. However, the unit commanders went off to New Year's parties before preparations were completed – no ammunition was distributed, nor were the armored vehicles refueled. The Khmer Rouge struck and disaster followed. As one American observed that this was the first sign that "things were really over."⁸⁹

(U) By January 1975, the Cambodian forces were barely holding onto Phnom Penh. Supply convoys came up the Mekong River, running a gauntlet of Khmer Rouge ambushes. By February 1975, even this link was lost, and the surrounded capital was totally reliant for supply by airlift. Within a month, the Khmer Rouge captured FANK 155mm artillery pieces and turned them on the city. On April 11, the airborne mission intercepted the Khmer Rouge orders to prepare for the final assault on Phnom Penh.⁹⁰



(U) USS Hancock of the task group that evacuated the Americans and others from Phnom Penh

(U) Admiral Gayler, the former DIRNSA now CINCPAC, informed Ambassador Dean that the end was near and that it was time to evacuate. Operation Eagle Pull was initiated on 12 April. A fleet of helicopters with the marine security force was launched in three waves from a task force in the Gulf of Siam. Within two hours of the choppers' arrival, the last evacuees, numbering 276, including 159 Cambodians, were safely aboard the navy ships. Despite an offer from Ambassador Dean, the Cambodian cabinet voted to stay behind even though they knew they had been named on Khmer Rouge death lists. On 17 April the Khmer Rouge troops entered the city proper. The cabinet and other government officials were executed, and the population was forced into an exodus to the countryside.

~~(S//SI)~~ Sadly, for the Cambodians, five years of war was only a preface to the terror that would follow the victory of the Khmer Rouge. There had been signs of the approaching darkness, but the reports were often dismissed as anticommunist



(U) Khmer Rouge soldiers in Phnom Penh shortly after its capture

propaganda. For example, in March 1974, when the Khmer Rouge captured the old capital city of Odongk, they had emptied it of its population and murdered teachers and civil servants. For two years prior to Phnom Penh's fall, SIGINT reports carried a few fragmentary reports of atrocities such as plans to massacre anticommunist demonstrators in the town of Charam.⁹¹ No one, though, was prepared for the killing fields that followed.

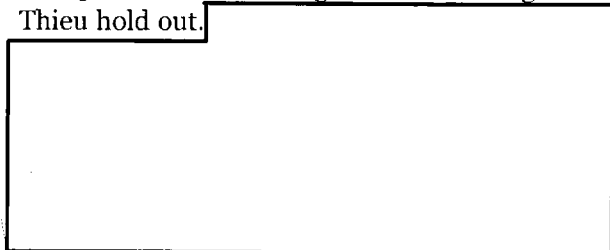
**(U) "Nothing Left to Give Up":
The Fall of Saigon, April 1975**

(S) Back in South Vietnam, the military situation continued to unravel. PAVN troops swept down the coast and seized Nha Trang. Other divisions emerged from the forest along the Cambodian border and pushed southeast towards Saigon and the Mekong Delta. The towns of An Loc and Tay Ninh fell, and several communist divisions were chasing the remnants of five ARVN divisions back to the outskirts of Saigon. The question for Washington was how long could Thieu hold out.

OGA



~~(S//SI)~~ The disasters at Pleiku and Danang had left the DGTS' capability seriously denuded of resources, especially those for collection, with which to cover the endangered parts of the country. By 31 March the losses included the two technical centers at Pleiku and Danang, five ASTDs, and twenty-five LLVI teams. This translated into personnel losses of nearly 600 veteran Vietnamese cryptologists, whose experience was virtually irreplaceable. Intercept of readable communist messages had declined over 60 percent, while ARDF fixes from the EC-47s had gone from a rough average of forty-five a day down to about thirty.⁹³ The most distressing loss was the intercept of PAVN tactical voice communications that the Vietnamese LLVI teams in MRs I and II had collected.⁹⁴ The DGTS sites along the coast would be unable to pick up the tactical communications. A plan was put forward to transform the DGTS' fleet of aircraft into collectors of these communications, but the obstacles were almost insurmountable since the delivery, processing, and reporting of the intercept would have to be geared up from scratch. The crews lacked the experience and ample secure communications to pass the intercept to the ground.



~~(S//SI)~~ By mid-April, the handful of survivors from the two overrun centers, as well as members of the scattered ASTDs and LLVI teams, had been gathered together at both the Saigon and Can Tho centers. [redacted] brought in more men and equipment from the unengaged ASTDs in the southern parts of Vietnam. Some of these personnel were shipped off to support Saigon's efforts at reconstituting the ASTDs for the ARVN 2nd and 22nd Divisions, which had been shattered in the north.⁹⁵

~~(S//SI)~~ In Saigon, the Vietnamese and their American counterparts managed to jury-rig almost four dozen additional intercept positions by using the equipment salvaged from Pleiku and Danang, and manning them with their survivors. Twenty of the positions were targeted against the PAVN units moving south along the coast. Another ten positions were to be added to the Vietnamese EC-47 aircraft. However, Unit 17's fleet had been reduced to eleven operational aircraft by the first week of April. How long the planes could survive communist SAMs and AAA, as well as the natural attrition of the increased operational tempo, was unknown. Furthermore, the JGS had refused [redacted] all requests for replacement aircraft.⁹⁶

~~(S//SI)~~ As the momentum of the communist attacks continued, it was realized in Saigon that the future of the Republic of Vietnam was, at best, problematic. Aside from trying to patch up a seriously depleted and depressed DGTS, the main issue for [redacted] increasingly became the evacuation of his staff from Saigon. It was a two-part problem. First, there were the Americans and their dependents. Forty-three people were on his staff. Ten families, totalling twenty-two dependents, had accompanied their spouses to Vietnam. By 25 March, [redacted] was already considering early options for evacuating the families.⁹⁷

~~(S//SI)~~ The second, and stickier, evacuation problem was the fate of the DGTS leadership.

There was a distinct fear within the NRV staff that the seniors would not fare well under a new regime; that there had always been a special interest in them by the communists.⁹⁸ As early as 1 April, the DIRNSA, Lieutenant General Lew Allen, had exchanged messages with [redacted] about devising lists of so-called Vietnamese "Key Indigenous Personnel" (KIP), who would be evacuated in case of Saigon's fall.⁹⁹ The Americans had to approach the Vietnamese gingerly; morale in the DGTS at the time, as it was throughout the South Vietnamese government, was fragile at best. [redacted] feared that talk of an evacuation could lead to a complete collapse of the DGTS.¹⁰⁰ [redacted] himself, was without illusions as to his fate. He told [redacted] that he and his family would not survive a communist takeover.¹⁰¹ Eventually, seven DGTS (and four J-6 or JGS COMSEC) personnel were added to the KIP list.

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] had another problem. He had to insure that no cryptologic or cryptographic material or equipment would be left behind for the communists to exploit if Saigon fell. On 5 April, he "quietly" began drawing up detailed descriptions and locations of sensitive DGTS files and equipment. When it was clear that the city was going to fall, he planned to go to [redacted] with the lists and enough explosives and combustibles to recommend to start destroying SIGINT material files, cryptologic hardware, software, and processing equipment.¹⁰²

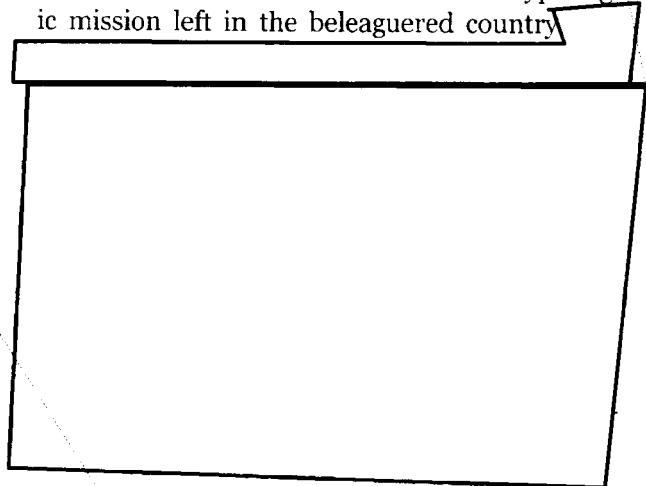
~~(S//SI)~~ The biggest difficulty for [redacted] plans was the personality and attitude of the American ambassador, Graham Martin. Since the NRV people [redacted]

Preliminary evacuation work had been completed earlier. The NRV personnel had been briefed on the three special rendezvous points in Saigon which had been selected well in advance and stocked with supplies if an extended stay was dictated by circumstances.¹⁰³

~~(S//SI)~~ At the beginning of April, [redacted] was able to get out dependents and nonessential personnel on early evacuation flights. His remaining staff was divided into three contingents. Each one reflected the increasing importance and relevance to the primary advisory mission to the DGTS, as well as the sensitivity of an individual's position and SIGINT knowledge. The first two contingents were flown out by mid-April. The last one was composed of the staff who were the most knowledgeable about the PAVN/DRV target and the capabilities of American (and South Vietnamese) SIGINT to exploit their communications.

would desert. He also pointed out that the situation around Saigon could decay a lot faster than the ambassador might think.¹⁰⁵ No doubt, as well, the memories of the disasters in Pleiku and Danang probably were fresh in [redacted] mind, and he did not want a repeat in Saigon.

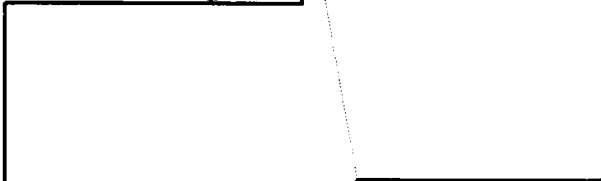
~~(TS//SI)~~ Nor was it an encouraging sign that the NRV was the last non-Vietnamese cryptologic mission left in the beleaguered country



(U) However, the situation in Indochina was getting desperate. On 11 April the Khmer Rouge troops had surrounded and isolated Phnom Penh, and President Ford implemented Operation Eagle Pull to evacuate the last Americans and the at-risk Cambodian leadership. The example from Cambodia could hardly be missed in Saigon. Already, Hanoi was positioning sixteen divisions around Saigon and its immediate region for the final assault.

~~(S//SI)~~ Martin's refusal to release the last civilians had upset the NSA leadership. A message from [redacted] describing Martin's stubborn-

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] aware of the situation, went to Ambassador Martin to push for the evacuation of the third contingent of [redacted]



[redacted] said that he and three communicators would stay behind and maintain the communications link between NSA and the DGTS.

~~(S//SI)~~ Martin angrily refused [redacted] request. The ambassador told [redacted] that he was under orders from President Ford to keep as many essential people as possible in Saigon. Martin believed that the DGTS would "collapse" once the Americans left. [redacted] argued that there was no evidence to suggest that the Vietnamese



(U) Ambassador Graham Martin

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ness spurred General Allen to contact the DCI, William Colby, with the request to release the last NSA contingent. Allen also sought assurance that [redacted] and his team of communicators be on the first increment of essential Americans when a final evacuation began.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, more pressure to get the American SIGINT personnel out came from an outside source: the CINCPAC, Admiral Noel Gayler, the DIRNSA prior to General Allen, was worried about the situation. Since it was his new command which would effect the evacuation, his concern was doubly urgent.¹⁰⁹

[redacted]

(S//SI) At this point, [redacted] urged everyone to back off from pressuring Ambassador Martin. The constant demand from [redacted] to evacuate the NSA people was creating the wrong impression with State and the CIA, he suggested. Also, he felt that when Saigon was hit, which would be soon, the ambassador would change his mind and let everyone go, including the NRV contingent. Until then, he recommended that the NSA leadership relent. His people were safely ensconced near the evacuation points with "enough small arms," so they would wait for events to turn.¹¹⁰

(S//SI) At the Saigon headquarters of the DGTS, [redacted] continuously harped on [redacted] about increasing efficiency of his operations, demanding he organize more ARDF flights, and restore the Pleiku and Danang missions. During one meeting, after listening to another round of demands for efficiency, [redacted] finally snapped at Glenn: "My first priority is saving people, then SIGINT production." He added that [redacted] concerns about improving the Vietnamese SIGINT mission could wait for the time being.¹¹³ The overall morale of the DGTS personnel had plummeted when the Vietnamese withdrew from the Central Highlands. The Vietnamese cryptologists were bewildered and dismayed by the disastrous turn of events. Their attitude had hardly improved since. The commander of the Saigon Processing Center accused the Americans of conspiring with Hanoi for a settlement. At the end of March, [redacted] had retreated to his office and stayed there for two weeks, weeping and talking to himself in what appeared to be to [redacted] as a near suicidal depression. [redacted] and his Vietnamese counterparts, notably the commander of Unit 15, [redacted] strove desperately to hold together a functioning DGTS operation.¹¹⁴

(TS//SI) Officials in both Saigon and Washington embraced scenarios that belied the military reality. There was talk in both cities of forming a new South Vietnamese government which would include opposition leaders; that somehow, this solution, by principally removing the reviled, incumbent Thieu regime, would placate the North Vietnamese enough for them to stop the advance and agree to a rump South Vietnam made up of territory around Saigon. This delusion led Martin to disbelieve that a final attack on Saigon was a short time away. The Combat Apple intercepts of PAVN VHF communications were declared deceptions, mere "spoofs" intended to intimidate the Saigon government into accepting a final political solution.¹¹¹

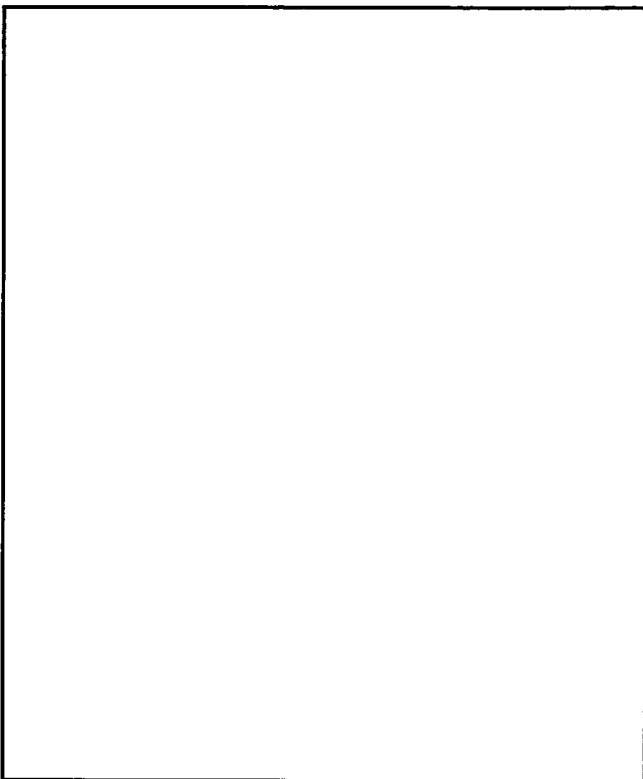
[redacted]

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(U) While these little dramas played out in Saigon, plans for the evacuation and the SIGINT support to it were already being put into action by Washington. With an already formidable naval task force in the South China Sea - part of which had assisted in Eagle Pull from Phnom Penh and the evacuation of Vietnamese and Americans from the northern MRs I and II - the U.S. Navy began concentrating off the coast of South Vietnam near the Vung Tau Peninsula. Task Force 76 was made up of several attack and amphibious carrier task groups totalling seventy-five warships with three battalions of Marines aboard. The plan, Frequent Wind (initially Talon Vise), called for evacuation points from the

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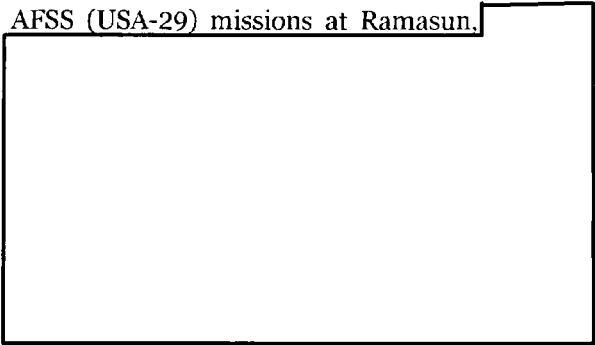
OGA



compensate for the gap, was equally unable to provide the tactical collection support needed for the evacuation. Even the DGTS' ARDF capability had been pretty much written off since most of Unit 17's fleet was grounded from a lack of contracted maintenance and equipment support.¹¹⁵




~~(S//SI)~~ The Frequent Wind planners needed SIGINT to answer two vital questions: What would be the North Vietnamese reaction to the airlift, and would there be any attempt by the Saigon regime to interfere with the evacuation? To cover these two contingencies, the U.S. had to regenerate a tactical capability in a hurry, one that could collect, process, and report quickly any moves by either side that might affect Frequent Wind. The solution was to surge the airborne collection capability in the region. Combat Apple coverage (RC-135s) went to twenty-four-hour operations providing voice intercept. The Navy's Big Look (P-3) missions went to sixteen-hour coverage for North Vietnamese naval reaction to the evacuation. Eight land sites were engaged to monitor Hanoi's activities: the ASA (USM-7) and AFSS (USA-29) missions at Ramasun.

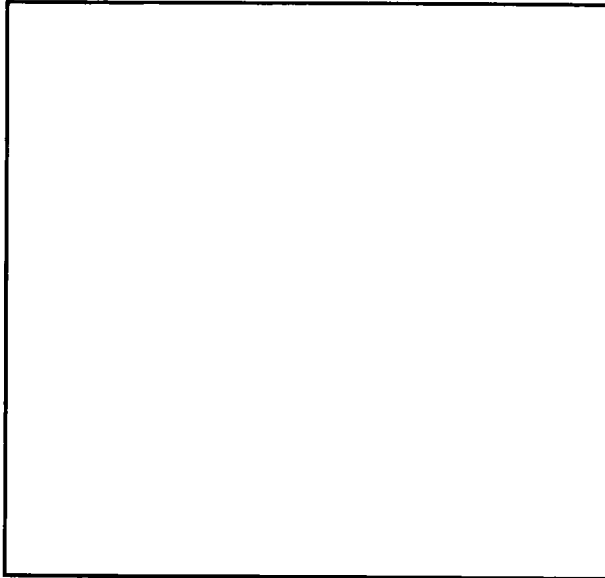


Defense Attaché Office compound at Tan Son Nhut Air Base and the American embassy in Saigon. The Marines would be used to secure the landing zones, while a fleet of Navy, Marine, and Air Force helicopters lifted out the remaining Americans and designated Vietnamese KIPs.

~~(S//SI)~~ In supporting Frequent Wind, American SIGINT had to overcome two major problems. First of all, the SIGINT structure in Southeast Asia, for all practical purposes, had been dismantled in the two years since the Paris Peace Agreement. There were no operational U.S. assets within South Vietnam. The regional, fixed collection sites, which included the 7th RRFs, Ramasun, Thailand, and those in the Philippines, could not provide the type of tactical support, either of tactical voice collection or direction finding, that was necessary to support the evacuation. Also, Vietnamese COMINT, weakened by the loss of most of its voice intercept capability, unable to securely communicate with the remaining LLVI teams, and with its aerial platforms unable to

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT's most useful contribution to the evacuation came from a rather unique task: the Olympic Torch airborne collection mission acted as a real-time relay (and monitor) for the U.S. helicopter pilot's communications with the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center. At the same time, the Olympic Torch ground element  also issued

short spot-type reports based on the U.S. communications which were distributed to Admiral Gayler and other key players and staff overseeing the evacuation. This latter report proved to be the most useful narrative of the Frequent Wind operation.¹¹⁸



(U) However, the events were outrunning everyone's plans. The last battle of significance, Xuan Loc, about forty miles northeast of Saigon, ended on 21 April. For almost three weeks, the troops of the ARVN 18th Division valiantly had held the city against the PAVN attacks. In the end, the PAVN units slipped to the west and threatened to cut off the defenders. On the morning of 21 April, Xuan Loc was abandoned. The same day, President Thieu resigned. In a television address to the country, Thieu blamed the Americans for failing to support him, reserving a special indictment of Henry Kissinger for negotiating the Paris Peace Agreement.¹²¹

(U) For a few days the battle around Saigon abated. Ambassador Martin presumed that this was a signal of sorts from Hanoi that it wanted to negotiate with a new government now that the hated Thieu was gone.¹²² Thieu had been replaced first by Vice President Tran Van Huong. Six days later, he resigned in favor of General Duong Van

Minh. Minh had been responsible for the coup that overthrew Diem back in 1963. There was a wisp of a hope that Minh, with a history of being a neutralist, could negotiate some final reprieve for Saigon.¹²³ In reality, General Dung was reorganizing his forces for the final push to take Saigon. Hanoi was not about to politically toss away anything it had gained, or stood to gain, from the battlefield.

(U) In the United States, no one was interested in restarting the war, or even in prolonging it. Pleas by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and General Fred Weyand to the Senate Appropriations Committee for a supplemental aid package to bolster Saigon fell on deaf ears. On 23 April, speaking before an audience at Tulane University, President Ford essentially wrote off the war. "Today, America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished. . . . These events, tragic as they are, portend neither the end of the world, nor of America's leadership in the world."¹²⁴

~~(S//SI)~~ On 26 April, the final attack on Saigon began with the shelling of Bien Hoa. PAVN units from the west and east closed in on the city. On the evening of 28 April, a flight of South Vietnamese aircraft, whose pilots had defected to the North Vietnamese, bombed Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Some sources insist that the pilots were "forced" to bomb the city. However,

[redacted] noted that the flight of aircraft was identified as "friendly." Furthermore, the aircraft had been given PAVNAF ciphers with which to communicate with their North Vietnamese controllers. The psychological impact of this was devastating on the South Vietnamese; interpreted as a coup attempt, it was the first time that any part of the South had been the target of a communist air strike.¹²⁵

(U) On 29 April President Ford ordered Frequent Wind to be implemented. Within hours,

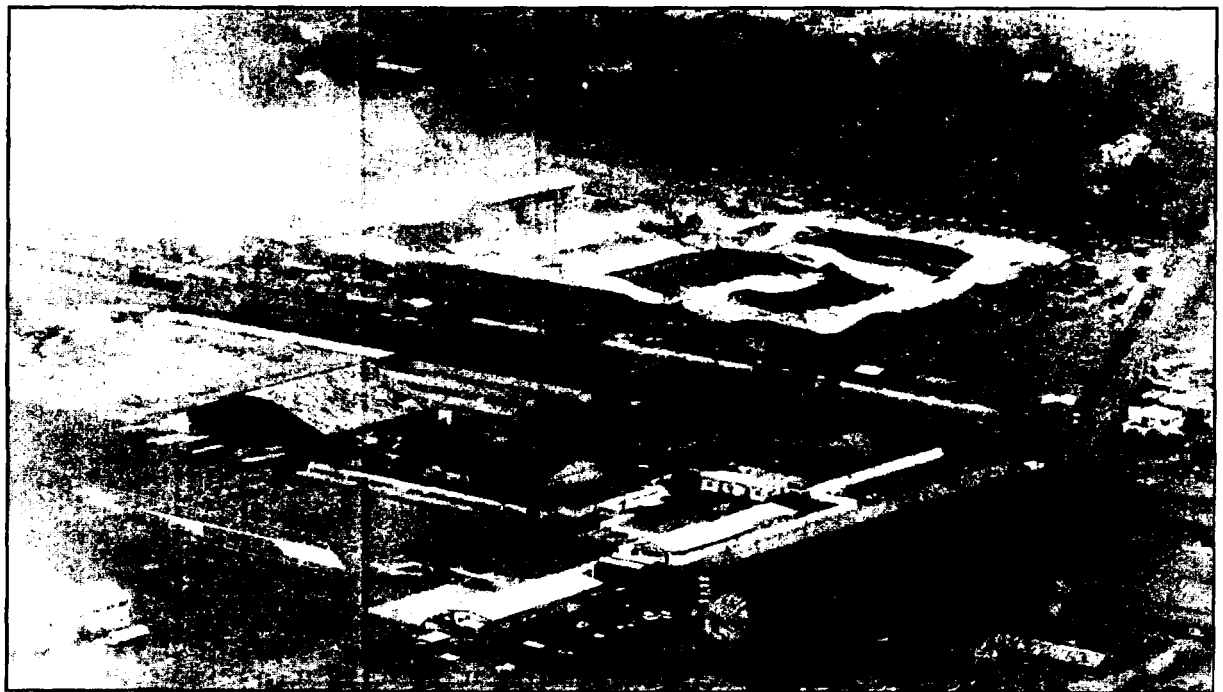
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helicopters from the offshore carriers began landing at the DAO compound and the embassy grounds. The first choppers discharged Marines who provided a security cordon around the sites. For the next eighteen hours, the helicopters kept up a steady routine of pickup and return. By the end of the period, about 7,200 people had been evacuated from Saigon to the armada waiting in the South China Sea. Upwards of another 70,000 Vietnamese fled by boat and ship to join the American fleet. By the morning of 30 April, the city was clear of Americans.

~~(S)~~ By and large, the extraction of the Americans and the Vietnamese went smoothly. Two Marines were killed during an earlier shelling of Tan Son Nhut. Also, some U.S. choppers and planes came under occasional communist ground fire and some handheld SA-7 missiles. A few were damaged. However, there was no indication that there was a deliberate policy to attack the aircraft by the North Vietnamese. The aircraft came under fire mostly over areas around

Saigon where there was fighting. Similarly, except for some random shots at the American embassy and some reports of shooting at other nationals fleeing the city, there was little harassment from the South Vietnamese.¹²⁶

~~(S//SI)~~ The evacuation of the American cryptologists had started some days earlier on 23 April when the penultimate contingent of Americans – the ones whose fate caused such friction between [] and Ambassador Martin – were finally flown out. By the morning of the 29th, only [] and two communication specialists remained in the besieged city. Finally, those three got the word to leave. They sent out the last message announcing their departure and destroyed the remaining cryptomaterial. However, they were isolated at their offices at the DAO compound. The military attaché got them into cars for a last ride to the embassy. Late that day, they alighted from a rescue chopper out of burning Saigon. The compound where their offices had been was flattened by charges set that day by the last Americans.



(U) USDAO compound after destruction by American-set charges, Saigon, 30 April 1975

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(S) By three in the morning of 30 April, there were 700 people, including 200 marines, still left to pull out of Saigon. The choppers were told that they could only pick up American civilians and the marines. That morning, some choppers had reported being fired at by SA-7 missiles. The area where the missiles came from were hit with an air strike. A half-hour later, a chopper, with the radio call-word Pineapple, was told that when the ambassador was taken out that he was to broadcast the codeword "Tiger." Another chopper, Lady Ace 9, was informed that the president personally was ordering the ambassador out of the city.¹²⁷

~~SECRET~~ HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY

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TO NSACSS

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~~SECRET~~ COMINT CHANNELS EXCLUSIVE FOR GENERAL ALLEN

FROM []

[] 1429-75

1. HAVE JUST RECEIVED WORD TO EVACUATE. AM NOW DESTROYING REMAINING CLASSIFIED MATERIAL. WILL CEASE TRANSMISSIONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THIS MESSAGE.

2. WE'RE TIRED BUT OTHERWISE ALL RIGHT. LOOKS LIKE THE BATTLE FOR SAIGON IS ON FOR REAL.

3. FROM GLENN: I COMMEND TO YOU MY PEOPLE WHO DESERVE THE BEST NSA CAN GIVE THEM FOR WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN THROUGH. BUT ESPECIALLY FOR WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED.

XGDS-2

#0158

~~SECRET~~ HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY

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This document contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the Espionage Laws, Title 18, United States Code, Sections 793 and 794, and the transmission or the revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

(S//SI) The last message from the NSA Representative in Saigon

(S) In its first approach, Lady Ace 9 was waved off from the roof of the embassy because smoke from a fire made it difficult to see where to land. The chopper pilot was reminded that he was not to pick up anyone until he relayed the presidential order for Ambassador Martin to leave. Finally, after a third pass, the chopper landed on the building. Thirteen minutes later, Lady Ace 9 took off with the ambassador and twenty-three other Americans on board. The intercept operator aboard the RC-135 heard "Lady Ace 09 is Tiger, Tiger, Tiger."¹²⁸ The North Vietnamese also knew that Martin had left. Their COMINT teams heard the same transmission and relayed the information to General Dung.¹²⁹

(S) There were still 200 Americans left, including 180 marines from the security force. The orders now were to get only the Americans out and leave the South Vietnamese. Two and a half hours later, helicopter gunships had to

accompany the rescue choppers as fighting broke out in the embassy grounds. The marines closed off the entrance to the roof of the embassy and waited to be picked up. Mobs of South Vietnamese broke into the embassy and looted it, but no effort was made to get to the roof. Finally, at almost eleven in the morning of 30 April, the last Americans, eleven marines, were lifted off of the embassy roof. The chopper pilot, Swift 22, announced that "All Americans are out, repeat out."¹³⁰

(S//SI) The SIGINT support to the evacuation, while extensive, was judged to be less than useful. The major problem was that the evacuation task force's major need was the positioning of enemy units. However, the SIGINT resources allocated to the rescue lacked a D/F capability against the high frequency and other communications systems used by Hanoi's forces. ELINT showing emitter locations, especially those sup-

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porting ground-based, radar-directed antiaircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles, was provided by the aerial platforms, but often was as much as six hours late.¹³¹



(U) Americans and Vietnamese wait outside the American embassy during the evacuation.

~~(S//SI)~~ The communists completed the capture of Saigon later on the same day. About two days earlier [redacted] and most of his senior officers had escaped in the American airlift [redacted]. [redacted] had not seen him leave and was concerned about what had happened. Several days before, their families had been flown out aboard so-called C-130 "Black Flights." Some members of Unit 17 flew their planes to bases in Thailand. A small contingent of Dancer program personnel, known as the Bees, stationed at the AFSS site at [redacted] also survived. Their families had been flown out on 24 April on another "Black Flight" to Guam or to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.¹³²

~~(S//SI)~~ However, few other DGTS personnel escaped; mostly they disappeared in the communist tide, their fate mostly a matter of rumor or conjecture. Some at NSA held that many high-ranking DGTS personnel who had stayed eventually rallied to Hanoi and joined the new regime.¹³³ Others suggested that some DGTS personnel wound up in the "reeducation camps" established by the communist victors.¹³⁴ In the absence of any reliable and detailed accounting, both views, to a degree, are probably valid.

(U) On 30 April, Minh ordered the remaining ARVN to ceasefire, and retired to the Presidential Palace to await the communists. A lone PAVN

(S)
Transmission from the rescue helicopter announcing that the last Americans were out of Saigon

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4.COMOUT.011
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SECRET
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SWIFT 22 IS OUTBOUND WITH 11 PAX ON BOARD INCLUDING THE LZ
COMMANDER. ALL THE AMERICANS ARE OUT REPEAT OUT.
--2351Z
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trooper found the group in the building as he was hanging the flag of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. He retrieved a senior officer to handle the situation. "We have been waiting for you," Minh told the officer, "so we could turn over the government." "You have nothing left to turn over," he was told.¹³⁵

(U) After thirty years, the war was over.

(U) Notes

1. (U) Schulzinger, 299.
2. (U) Ibid.
3. (U) Clarke, 491; Herring, 278-280.
4. (U) Schulzinger, 301.
5. (U) Karnow, 653.
6. ~~(TS//SI)~~ CINCPAC Study Group Report, *The Application of ECM/ELINT/COMINT During Linebacker II*, Volume I, Findings and Summaries, February 1973, 92.
7. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 101.
8. (U) Gibson, 416; Schulzinger, 302; Young, 278-279.
9. (U) Gibson, 416-417; *New York Times*, 25 December 1972.
10. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 1999-74, Oral History interview with [redacted] conducted by Sharon Maneki and Robert Hanyok, 24 September 1999, CCH.
11. (U) Hersh, 629n.
12. (U) Ibid.
13. (U) Phonecon, author with Air Intelligence Agency historian Juan Jiminez, 2 September 1999.
14. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Summary of Paris Peace Talks, Messages #96, 8 January 1973 and #99, 9 January 1973, CCH Series VI.HH.26.7, "Summary of Vietnamese Peace Talks, Vol. 6.
15. (U) Schulzinger, 303.
16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Summary of Paris Peace Talks, Message #115, 14 January 1973.
17. (U) Schulzinger, 312-313.
18. (U) Young, 289.
19. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 104
20. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] NSA Oral History Interview 6-92, 2 December 1992, CCH.
21. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR VN to DIRNSA, 140710Z December 1973, [redacted] 4414-73.
22. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR VN to DIRNSA, 250945Z January 1973, [redacted] 0533-73.
23. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
24. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR VN to DIRNSA, 300740Z January 1973, [redacted] 0633-73.
25. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA, B-054-73, 242346Z February 1973.
27. ~~(S//SI)~~ B6-096-72, "Cryptologic Vietnamization," 22 February 1972, CCH Series VI.HH.1-10.
28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ CCH Series VI.HH.6.50, "SIGINT Operations Plan for Southeast Asia," 5 February 1974, Annex A, Appendix 1.1.
29. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. III, 25-26; also CCH Series XII. Box H.19.
30. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 166.
31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.
32. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Las Casas, 83.
33. ~~(S//SI)~~ Director NSA to SSO CINCPAC, "Cryptologic Drawdown in Southeast Asia," DIR/CH-104-73, 2349Z 20 September 1973.
34. ~~(S//SI)~~ "U.S. Cryptologic Information and the ARVN SIGINT Organization," March 1972, CCH Series VI.HH.6.50.
35. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Expansion of Technical Support to the SSTB," B6-044-72, 26 January 1972, CCH Series VI.HH.6.50.
36. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA [redacted] D-42-05-74, 022110Z January 1974.
37. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
38. ~~(S//SI)~~ Director's Brief, [redacted] Request for ADP Support," April 1974, NCA, ACC# 1896, H01-0210-5.
39. ~~(S//SI)~~ "DGTS Computer Planning," [redacted] 1899074, 280740Z May 1974, NCA, ACC# 1896.
40. ~~(S//SI)~~ "Plans for DGTS ADP Use," [redacted] 1016-75, 150330Z March 1975, NCA, ACC# 1896.
41. ~~(S//SI)~~ NRV to DIRNSA, [redacted] 0533-73, 250945Z January 1973, NCA, ACC# 30408.
42. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

43. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA, 211015Z June 1973, [] 1572-73, NCA, ACC# 1896.
44. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA, 120955Z April 1974, [] 1298-74, NCA, ACC# 30408.
45. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA. "DGTS Activation," 290915Z November 1974, [] 4409-74, NCA, ACC# 30408.
46. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA, "DGTS Reporting," 300050Z January 1975, F46-0399075, NCA, ACC# 30408.
47. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
48. ~~(S//SI)~~ "Contingency Planning for Emphasized U.S. SIGINT Collection Against Enemy Targets in South Vietnam," N0119, 30 January 1975, NCA, ACC# 30044.
49. (U) Pike, 103.
50. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/00/15248-74, 042251Z October 1974.
51. (U) Merle L. Pribbenow, "North Vietnam's Final Offensive: Strategic Endgame Nonpareil," *Parameters*, Vol XXIX, No. 4 Winter 1999-2000, 61.
52. (U) Karnow, 663.
53. (U) Gibson, 428.
54. (U) Pribbenow, 63; Young, 292.
55. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 108.
56. (U) Karnow, 661.
57. ~~(S//SI)~~ For a typical report, see 2 [] 201-75, 190021Z February 1975, "Unidentified NVA Unit Reports Bombardment Results."
58. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/00/18892-74, 162131Z December 1974.
59. (U) Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The Final Collapse* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1983), 67.
60. (U) Pribbenow, 65.
61. (U) Colonel William E. Le Gro, *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1985), 138-139.
62. (U) Schulzinger, 320.
63. (U) Gaddy, 171. Senior General Van Tien Dung, *Great Spring Victory* (Washington, D.C.: FBIS-APA-76-110, Vol. IV, No. 110, Supp. 38, June 1976, 13-15. Describes the deceptive measures to hide Dung's trip to the Central Highlands. See page 27 for comments on messages to Hanoi.
64. (U) Pribbenow, 67; Gaddy, 173.
65. (U) Ralph Bennett, *Ultra in the West: the Normandy Campaign, 1944-45* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1979), 40-42.
66. (U) Vien, 74. OGA
67. (U) Ibid., 69; Le Gro, 141.
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69. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/00/4562-75, 211917Z March 1975. See "Unidentified NVA Division in Ban Me Thuot Area." 2/00/4484-75, 192135Z March 1975. issued 8 days after the attack.
70. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/00/1006-75, 211424Z January 1975.
71. (U) Le Gro, 152; Vien, 69; ~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT indicated that the 316th Division was being "regenerated" from January 1975 onwards and was located in Nghe An Province, North Vietnam. All communications serving the division ceased on 11 February, although references to it receiving supplies continued into March. By 25 March NSA admitted that "available evidence" (not specified) suggested the 316th had deployed to South Vietnam. See 2/00/4932-75, 262136Z March 75.
72. (U) Vien, 69.
73. ~~(S//SI)~~ NRV to DIRNSA, F46-0793-75, 281048Z February 1975.
74. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/00/4126-75, 141458Z March 1975; 2 [] 571-75, 290423Z March 1975.
75. (U) Senior General Van Tien Dung, *Great Spring Victory* (Washington, D.C.: FBIS-APA-76-110, Vol. IV, No. 110 7, Supp. 38, July 1976), 19-20.
76. (U) Vien, 73.
77. (U) William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 176.
78. (U) Le Gro, 153.
79. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [] 1106-75, 210840Z March 1975.
80. ~~(S//SI)~~ [] 5.
81. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [] 1244-75, 030840Z April 1975.
82. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [] 1325-75, 130300Z April 1975.
83. ~~(S//SI)~~ Interview with [] [] 2 December 1992, by Charles Baker and Thomas Johnson, OH 6-92, NSA, CCH.

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

84. Oral History interview with Ralph Adams, 24 August 1995, with Robert J. Hanyok, OH 35-95, NSA, CCH.
85. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 6-92, 24.
86. (U) Gaddy, 176. Dung, Vol. II, Supp. 38, 73-74.
87. (U) William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1980), see pages 270, 295-297, and 372-373 for discussions of the effectiveness of the bombing.
88. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 6-92, 11.
89. (U) Ibid.
90. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 91630Z April 1975, CCH Series VI.HH.26.9.
91. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/00/1078-74. 141925Z January 1974.
92. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 112.
93. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1201-75, 310925Z March 1975.
94. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1110-75, 210844Z March 1975.
95. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., NCR (VN) 130300Z April 1975.
96. ~~(S)~~ USDAO, 100800Z April 1975.
97. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, 250906Z March 1975.
98. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 6-92, 26.
99. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NRV, D3-220-75, 011724Z April 1975.
100. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1227-75, 020240Z April 1975.
101. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1247-75, 030926Z April 1975.
102. (U) NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1267-75, 050227Z April 1975.
103. (U) Ibid., NCR (VN), 250906Z March 1975.
104. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1368-75, 1711145Z April 1975.
105. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
106. [redacted]
107. [redacted]
108. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSA NSOC, 172330Z April 1975, CCH Series VI.HH.25.3.
109. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPAC #0633, 170055Z April 1975.
110. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, 180315Z April 1975.
111. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 5.
112. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 114; also see Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End* (New York: Random House, 1977), 420.
113. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1100-75, 200912Z March 1975, NCA, ACC# 30044.
114. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1102-75, 200931Z March 1975, NCA, ACC# 30044; [redacted] OH 04-86, 83.
115. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1390-75, 210530Z April 1975.
116. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1393-75, 220203Z April 1975.
117. ~~(S//SI)~~ Memorandum, "SIGINT Support to FREQUENT WIND OPNS," V3-256-75, 16 April 1975.
118. ~~(S//SI)~~ SSO PACOM# 3783, 032246Z May 1975.
119. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA, B3-080-75, 241616Z April 1975.
- [redacted]
121. (U) Young, 297.
122. (U) Le Gro, 176. EO 1.4.(c)
123. (U) Schulzinger, 326.
124. (U) Karnow, 667.
125. ~~(S//SI)~~ This interesting anecdote has several viewpoints. General Vien, in his history of the collapse of South Vietnam, suggests that "communists" were piloting the planes and staged from Phan Rang Airbase, east of Dalat (150). (U) Colonel Le Gro suggests that the pilots were forced to fly the planes (177). However, there is substantial evidence that the flight was conducted under the complete control of the North Vietnamese. (U) The pilots were issued the necessary ciphers for the mission (Gaddy, 180). ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] North Vietnamese air surveillance tracking that reported the flight as a "friendly." Richard Crothers, E-mail to author, 25 April 2000, 12:17 P.M.
126. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] Spot Series, [redacted] File, CCH Series VI.HH.26.14.
127. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., 523-119-FYI, 2045Z 30 April 1975.
128. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., 523-119-FYI, 2058Z 30 April 1975.
129. (U) Dung, Vol II, supp. 42, 7 July 1976, 115.
130. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., Milligan, 2351Z 30 April 1975.
131. ~~(S//SI)~~ SSO PACOM, "Frequent Wind Critique," 032246Z May 1975, CCH Series VI.HH.26.9.

132. (S//SI) Hanyok, "Relevant Truths," 42.

133. (TS//SI)

P.L. 86-36

134. (S//SI) OH 33-87.

135. (U) Young, 297.