

SUMMARY OF TET BATTLES IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Camp Enari---The Tet offensive came as no surprise to the Republic of Vietnam and U.S. Forces in the Central Highland provinces of Kontum, Pleiku and Darlac. At least two weeks before the enemy's country-wide offensive, intelligence sources in this area had learned of the plan for attack.

Acting in his capacity as senior U.S. commander in the area, Major General Charles P. Stone, commander of the 4th Infantry Division, called together all of the commanders of U.S. Forces in the area on January 24 and advised them of these plans in detail. He also conferred with Lieutenant General Vinh Loc, the II Corps commander at the time, assuring that both ARVN and U.S. Forces had all available information in order to react to the enemy's ambitious plan for attacking the cities by means of infiltration and ground assault.

According to this intelligence information, the attack was to have begun on the night of January 28. When it did not come on that night, the forces in the area were able to increase even further their state of readiness. Shortly after midnight on the 30th of January the enemy struck the Highland cities of Kontum and Pleiku attempting to penetrate the various military compounds in those cities. In every case the lightly defended Allied compounds repulsed the probes, holding out until daybreak when ARVN and 4th Infantry Division reinforcements began to arrive. By Tuesday afternoon, the first day of Tet, the enemy's offensive had suddenly turned into a defensive fight for their lives.

In the city of Pleiku the enemy never at anytime was able to control any part of the city. The time-table of his ground attack apparently went wrong with several battalion-sized VC and NVA elements being caught out in the open after daylight moving toward Pleiku. In one of these actions, elements of the 3rd ARVN Cavalry and gunships from the 52nd Aviation Battalion and the Division's 4th Aviation Battalion, killed 260 enemy southwest of Pleiku. Farther south, a VC unit which was pushing 200 Montagnard civilians in front of them as a human shield, were trapped by elements of a 4th Division air cavalry squadron. The civilians were detained and the VC were either killed or scattered into the hills. Division tanks and two

companies of Engineers, fighting as infantrymen, contained the remaining threat to Pleiku by the second day (Jan 31). The damage to Pleiku was slight, being estimated at approximately 5% rather than the 50% reported by a U.S. news magazine.

In Kontum, VC infiltrators held the city's post office briefly the first day and the market place became infested with enemy. By afternoon, infantry reinforcements from the 4th Division's 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry and gunships had cleared the marketplace, leaving only scattered pockets of enemy holed-up in houses, temples and churches. Within three days after the initial attack, the town was clear of enemy and the 24th NVA Regiment was being pursued by the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry northeast of the city.

Over a thousand enemy ultimately lost their lives in and around Kontum, with the Allied losses being just over sixty. A band of VC that had attempted to take the Province Chief's house were all killed early the first morning. A check of the bodies at the first light of day revealed that among the group were virtually all of the known local VC leaders. What is believed to have been the majority of the Kontum VC infrastructure was destroyed in the enemy's over-confident attempt to take over the city.

Possibly because of the unsettling effect of several offensive actions by the 4th Division and ARVN forces in the Dak To area the week before Tet, the enemy was never able to make an attack on Dak To. The only significant enemy activity in the area was at the district headquarters town of Tanh Canh where local ARVN forces quickly put down an attack against the town.

Except for the first day of the attack when all roads in the Division's area of operations were closed as a precautionary measure, the roads remained open for military traffic. Before the end of the first week of the Tet attack, civilian vehicles were seen on highways throughout this part of the Central Highlands.

There were approximately 140 houses destroyed in Pleiku, all of which are now being rebuilt. Civil affairs officers of the Division estimate that the town is 85% back to normal, with commerce almost being back to its pre-Tet level.

Kontum, which despite the intense fighting within the city, had fewer family dwellings destroyed than Pleiku, is almost completely back to

normal. Commerce returned to the city almost the day the last enemy soldier was driven from the town.

The Tet battle was over in this area by the 9th of February. In those short eleven days the enemy had lost nearly 3000 troops, the U.S. under 50 and the ARVN approximately 145.

The 4th Division went to the defense of these cities, cleared them of enemy within a maximum of three days and was not forced to draw-down on the forces which are constantly seeking out and destroying the enemy in the hills around Dak To and southwest of Pleiku.