

Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations

The 1972 Invasion of Military Region I: Fall of Quang Tri and Defense of Hue

15 March 1973

HQ PACAF
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Prepared by: Capt. David K. Mann
Project CHECÒ 7th AF (CDC)



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PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in USAF airpower being employed to meet a multitude of requirements. These varied applications have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, operational data and experiences have accumulated which should be collected, documented, and analyzed for current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity which would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA and would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet the Air Staff directive. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements in Southeast Asia, Project CHECO provides a scholarly "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation--recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

Robert E. Hiller

ROBERT E. HILLER
Director of Operations Analysis
DCS/Operations

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FOREWORD

The Fall of Quang Tri and the Defense of Hue is one in a series of Project CHECO Southeast Asia reports examining the role of airpower during the NVA 1972 offensive. One of the major thrusts of this offensive was in Military Region I. The North Vietnamese hoped to conquer Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces and then place them under their political as well as military control. This study traces the action of NVA forces and the response of allied forces to the invasion of MR I.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW

On 30 March 1972, regular units of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) initiated a large scale offensive against fire support bases (FSBs) along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in northern Quang Tri Province of Military Region One (MR I). As the enemy opened major drives into Kontum Province of MR II and Binh Long Province of MR III, it became clear that the initial attacks were part of a large-scale invasion. For the first time in the Vietnamese conflict, the NVA used a conventional military strategy, employing combined infantry, artillery, and armor tactics. The overall scope and intensity of the aggression surprised most official sources. In addition to the usual NVA/VC guerrilla hit and run assaults, ambushes, acts of harassment, sabotage, propaganda, and terrorism, the NVA added conventional tactics, weapons, and equipment.

The seriousness of the situation was fully recognized by the United States and South Vietnam, and both states acted to meet the challenge. All concerned realized that the major attacks in South Vietnam were a crucial test of Vietnamization and that everything possible must be done to successfully counter the NVA offensive. The South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) quickly deployed General Reserve Forces to reinforce the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) infantry divisions in high threat areas. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) authorized the employment of Seventh Air Force (7AF) air assets and U.S. Naval gunfire (NGF)

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against enemy positions. The JCS also authorized the deployment of additional U.S. resources from other Pacific Command and United States (CONUS) locations.

The U.S. response to the NVA assault in MR I was predominantly air and consisted primarily of tactical air (TACAIR) strikes by USAF, USN, and USMC fighter-bombers, heavy bombardment by giant B-52 Arc Light bombers, and close air support, armed reconnaissance, and interdiction by fixed-wing gunships.

The struggle in MR I saw the loss of Quang Tri Province, with the defeated forces falling back toward Hue, solidifying their positions, and then pushing back toward Quang Tri City. The turning point was at Hue, where defensive positions surrounding the Imperial City in Thua Thien Province held against repeated assaults, at first blunting, and ultimately reversing, the enemy progress in MR I.

The eventual victory in defense of Hue scored by government forces was a team effort. The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF), facing NVA units without the assistance of U.S. ground combat troops, fought well in defense of their nation. Vietnamization, in terms of the capability of Republic of Vietnam (RVN) ground and air military forces to confront and withstand the Communist surge, had proven itself a success. Still, the role of U.S. airpower was a vital, deciding factor in the overall offensive. General John W. Vogt, Jr., Deputy COMUSMACV and Commander, 7AF, asserted that airpower was a major force in defeating the invasion.^{1/}

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The effectiveness of air, combined with the stiffening resolve of the ARVN, forced the enemy to mass. And when massed, air could strike ideal targets for the first time in the offensive. Instead of trying to locate guerrillas dispersed in hamlets and hidden throughout the countryside, tactical air resources were ~~not~~ able to attack troop concentrations and mechanized units massed in great strength.

* NW

* DOAD correction letter, 6 Apr 1973

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CHAPTER II
OFFENSIVE INDICATORS

On the eve of the offensive, intelligence information did not clearly indicate North Vietnam's (NVN) overall goals or plan of execution. Available intelligence, however, indicated that attacks would most likely occur in Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces of MR I, and Kontum and Pleiku Provinces of MR II.^{2/} One NVA prisoner revealed that in late March, 1972, he had been informed that the goals of the forthcoming NVA offensive included the following: demonstrating to the RVN Government the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong's (VC) determination to fight and defeat ARVN in the field; to gain new territory to place under the NVN flag on Ho Chi Minh's 83rd birthday on 19 May; and to end the war.^{3/} To attain these goals, the NVA would launch a general offensive at the end of March. They regarded the offensive as one of "the greatest strategic decisions," which required close coordination between all civilian and military groups in sympathy with, or directly supporting, the North Vietnamese government.^{4/} In MR I, the plans called for the "liberation" of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces, as well as the establishment of a local government to control the population. The cities of Quang Tri and Hue would be primary objectives.^{5/}

Confirming other intelligence sources was allied observation of increased NVA logistics activity during the dry season preceding the offensive. In western Quang Tri Province, enemy construction had continued on the route networks connecting Laos and South Vietnam, and, in

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spite of continuous air interdiction, considerable NVA traffic flowed into Quang Tri Province via Route 9.^{6/} (See Figure 1.) In Thua Thien Province, sensor activations and visual reconnaissance indicated increased enemy logistics activity in the A Shau Valley and an expedited flow of goods south into western Quang Nam Province. While the major activity was concentrated in the most northern provinces of MR I, enemy construction crews and transportation units were active throughout the region.^{7/}

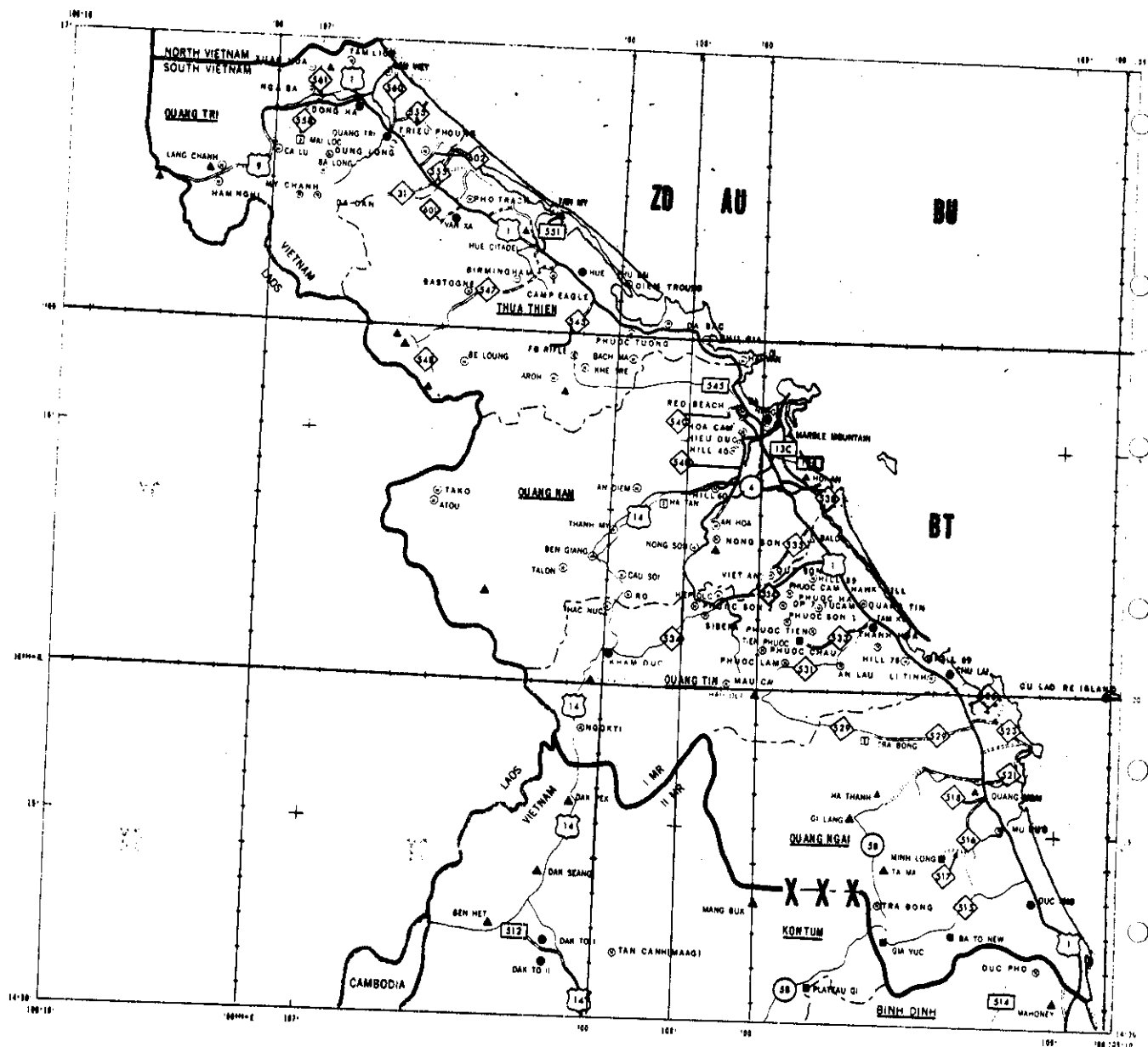
In an effort designed to protect the logistics activities from air interdiction efforts, the enemy intensified and expanded their air defense system, which included both anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) and surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). At least six AAA regiments were located in or near MR I, and the NVA also integrated AAA weapons into regular artillery, armored, or other units.^{8/}

In addition to troop and supply movements, intelligence sources detected increased amounts of enemy equipment moving in and around MR I, including the long range 130mm field guns.^{9/} Numerous enemy tanks (of several types) also appeared in, above, and below the DMZ. Therefore, the NVA's use of tanks in MR I was predicable; however, the numbers actually employed were significantly greater than the official pre-offensive estimate of 208.^{10/}

Underscoring the intelligence information which indicated a possible offensive, the number of enemy-initiated combat incidents in MR I steadily increased. In retrospect, these incidents probably not only presaged, but

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MR I Major Road Net and Airfields

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also were an early part of the offensive plan in MR I.^{11/} As early as 29 January, elements of the 31st and 84th NVA regiments conducted mixed rocket, mortar, and ground attacks against A-3 and C-2 FSBs in northern Quang Tri Province. On 30 January, Camp Carroll, located near Mai Loc, was hit by 49 122mm rockets. (See Figure 2.) In February, enemy activity continued to escalate in both Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces, which the VC had designated Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue. Two NVA regiments began activities southwest of Hue, and, on 13 February, the enemy initiated attacks by fire (ABF) on FSB Bastogne. This attack consisted of 30 82mm mortar rounds. FSB Rifle received 150 82mm mortar rounds, which were followed by a ground attack on 17 February. The pattern of increasing enemy activity continued in March. Few FSB locations were spared from enemy attack activity. Over 500 incidents occurred throughout MR I during the 60 days prior to the commencement of the offensive.^{12/} During this time, the NVA avoided troop contact with ARVN forces while preparing for future tactical activity.

As in other areas of South Vietnam, government forces expected an offensive, but evidence remained inconclusive as to the scope and definite plans of the North Vietnamese. The enemy-initiated combat incidents and the logistics activity seemed to indicate that MR I was a target. Some sources suggested that the attack could come as early as Tet (14 February), while others indicated it might occur as late as July because of allied interdiction efforts which, they thought, had altered the enemy's timetable. Others, including some "senior Pentagon officials" and ARVN

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generals, believed no offensive would come before the end of March.^{13/}
Despite the lack of agreement concerning the time frame of the enemy offensive, the consensus nevertheless indicated an all-out NVN effort. Consequently, the allies conducted ground and air campaigns designed to disrupt enemy plans.

In the ground phase of the allied interdiction campaign, all three ARVN divisions in MR I sought to reduce the mounting enemy pressure, to disrupt enemy preparations for the predicted offensive, and to establish ARVN in favorable positions for further government offensive actions.^{14/}

On 5 March, the 1st ARVN Division initiated an interdiction effort, called Lam Son 45, in western Thua Thien Province. Targeted against suspected enemy movements out of the A Shau Valley into a staging area north of Route 547, the specific mission was to clear the areas south of FSB Rakkason and southwest of FSB Bastogne of NVA and VC units.^{15/} While gathering battle damage assessment (BDA) resulting from Arc Light (B-52) strikes near Dong Cu Mong, ARVN confirmed that a major enemy buildup was in progress in the area. Indications were that the ultimate enemy mission was to disrupt pacification in the lowlands of Thua Thien and to seize Hue. Other ARVN probing actions in conjunction with Lam Son 45 received significant resistance from enemy forces; this further confirmed the buildup.^{16/}

The 1st ARVN Division claimed the Lam Son 45 action had preempted enemy plans for coordinated attacks against their units around FSB Bastogne. The U.S. Army Senior Advisor to the ARVN 1st Division, Col

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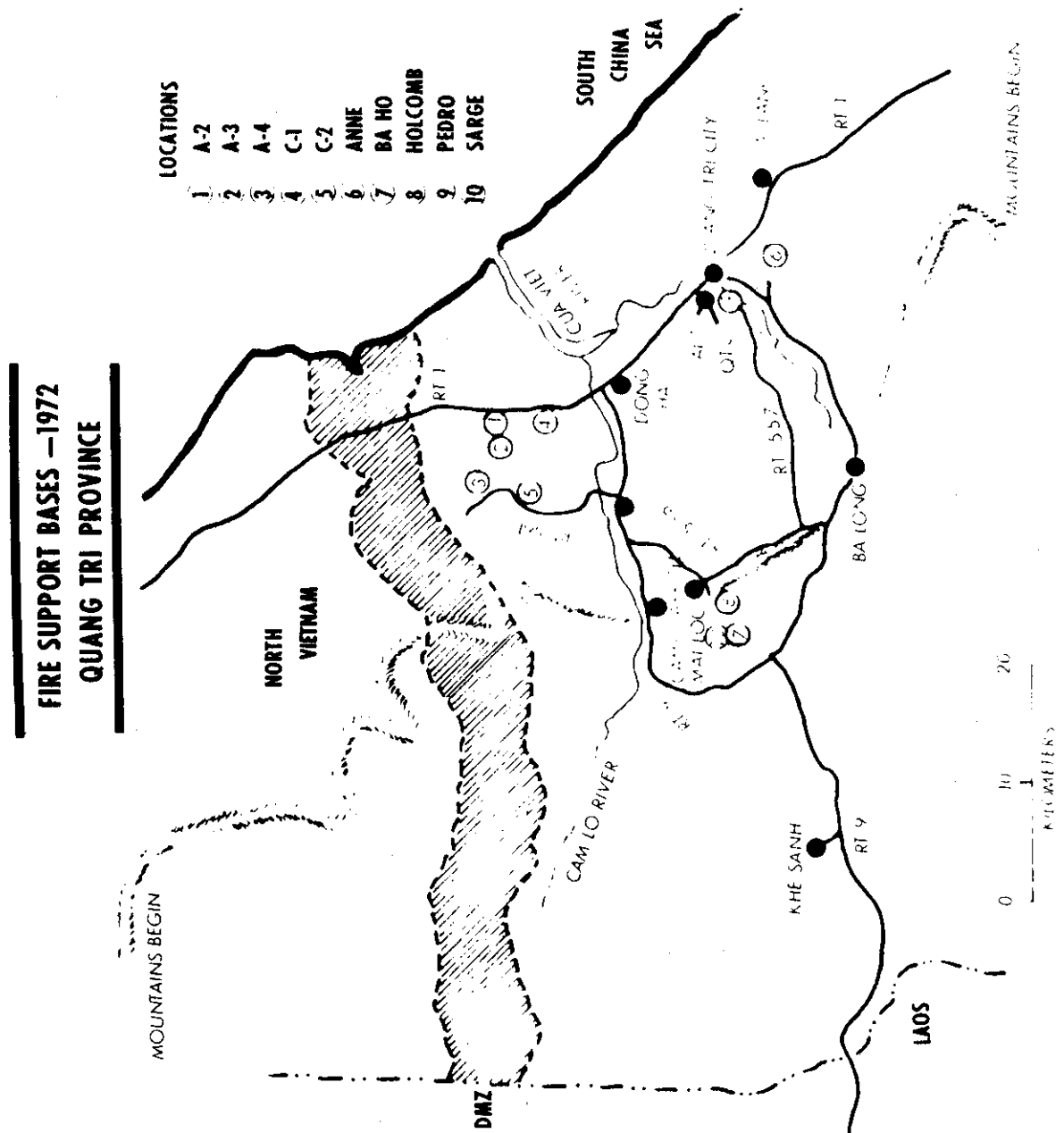


FIGURE 2

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Hiliman Dickinson, credited airpower for outstanding support in the operation. Forty Arc Light strikes in a tactical support role, as well as U.S. and South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) TACAIR, reduced enemy resistance and impeded the flow of enemy supplies and equipment. Although accurate battle damage assessment (BDA) figures were not available, Col Dickinson estimated that aerial support took a heavy toll.^{17/}

In addition to supporting the ground attempts to forestall the NVA offensive, allied airpower was already engaged in a major operation called Commando Hunt VII. As in other annual odd-numbered Commando Hunt interdiction campaigns, the principal object was to inhibit the flow of supplies and equipment from Laos to enemy forces in South Vietnam during the dry season. Now the object was not only to stop resupply intended to sustain NVA troops in the field, but to halt the greatly increased flow of men and materials required for a major offensive.

Commando Hunt VII attempted to secure allied goals by continued attacks on Laotian passes with B-52s and TACAIR strikes to keep material from entering South Vietnam. Targets discovered enroute to the passes or already in South Vietnam were engaged and destroyed by TACAIR and gunships. Wherever necessary to support the interdiction effort, gunships and F-4s teamed to conduct AAA suppression missions.^{18/}

A new development during the 1971-1972 dry season interdiction campaign was the expanded air defense posture of the enemy in the DMZ area. Both AAA and SAMs posed a serious threat to interdiction efforts in the

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vicinity of the MR I entry routes. By 19 March, the AAA included 23mm and 37mm weapons grouped to comprise at least six high threat AAA areas.^{19/}

In the long run, the appearance of the SA-2 (SAM) missile in MR I was far more critical. In early February, 12 SAM sites were identified in areas near the DMZ, and four approximately 10 NM north of the DMZ.^{20/} With an effective envelope of up to 60,000 feet, the introduction of SAMs ended the permissive environment required for the truck-killing AC-130 gunship. This point was forcefully underscored on 28 March when an SA-2 missile launched from the Tchepone area, west of the DMZ, struck an AC-130 gunship. As a result of this loss, 7AF declared a "missile ring" in the Tchepone area. It was obvious to the gunship specialists that the NVA was using the SAMs to restrict gunship combat operations and thus to hasten and increase the flow of supplies in the South.^{21/} As evidenced by the amounts of equipment used by enemy forces during the spring offensive, the deployment of AAA and SAMs was undoubtedly a contributing factor to the initial NVA battle successes.

In other related actions, 7AF launched a major air effort against selected 130mm field artillery pieces, surface-to-surface rocket sites, and enemy logistic complexes within 4 NM of the DMZ/North Vietnam border. These were in addition to efforts directed against SAM sites in Route Pack I of southern North Vietnam.^{22/}

The overall impact of allied activity such as the Commando Hunt VII and Lam Son 45 operations on the enemy buildup can only be estimated. Considering the strength displayed by NVA forces during the invasion of MR I, it is tempting to discredit these interdiction efforts. The

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allied operations described above, however, may have prevented an enemy buildup that would have totally overwhelmed the ARVN forces which were not prepared to cope with a major invasion.

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CHAPTER III

OPENING ATTACKS ON QUANG TRI PROVINCE

On 30 March 1972, the anticipated NVN offensive began in Quang Tri Province. A large, well-coordinated attacking force, estimated to be three divisions plus supporting units, launched heavy attacks in MR I. One of these division-sized units crossed the DMZ from North Vietnam, while the other two, already operating in-country, launched attacks against friendly fire support bases north and west of Quang Tri City. Heavy artillery barrages preceded the NVA troop advances, which were supported by tanks, artillery, and mobile AAA and SAM batteries.^{23/}

To overcome the allied airpower advantage, the enemy apparently planned the start of the offensive to coincide with the adverse weather conditions of the Northwest Monsoon Season. This weather pattern severely restricted the application of close air support by U.S. and VNAF air resources during the opening days of the offensive.^{24/}

A series of coordinated attacks against fire support bases and other small combat bases heralded the offensive. Hundreds of 122mm rockets, 130mm rounds, and other ordnance were fired against friendly positions at FSBs Sarge, Holcomb, Fuller, A-2, A-4, C-1, and C-2, as well as combat bases located at Ba Ho, Mai Loc, and Dong Ha.^{25/} (See Figure 2.) In most cases, the NVA followed the preparatory fire with attacks by ground units supported by T-54, T-34, and PT-76 tanks. While tanks were present almost everywhere, tank activity was especially prevalent in the Dong Ha area.^{26/} While the

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RVNAF needed air support desperately, many difficulties in providing such support arose because of the marginal weather.

Early on the evening of 30 March, a request was forwarded by the South Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC) 8th Battalion at FSB Holcomb for a flare ship and gunship. A USAF AC-119 "Stinger" arrived on station and orbited for one and one-half hours. U.S. Marine advisors exposed themselves to intense enemy artillery fire in an attempt to use a transponder to direct the aircraft. However, the Stinger was unable to lock onto the ground beacon, and thereby lost its all-weather effectiveness. The use of an infrared strobe did enable the aircraft to locate the target area, drop ground flares, and fire on enemy positions, but when the weather deteriorated further, Stinger could not continue its support.^{27/}

On the morning of 31 March, a USAF Forward Air Controller (FAC) flew in the FSB Sarge and Ba Ho areas and, despite marginal weather, attempted to locate enemy artillery firing positions. Through the FAC's assistance, friendly 155mm batteries at Mai Loc were able to fire on suspected gun positions and suppress enemy fire. Throughout the day, large-sized enemy units were sighted on all sides of Sarge and Ba Ho, and several enemy ground attacks stalled under the withering fire of FAC-directed close air support. One ground advisor called in a strike 200 meters from friendly positions, but later the poor weather prohibited additional TACAIR strikes against troop concentrations. In such instances, strikes were then placed on suspected artillery positions.^{28/} Under such

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conditions, often the only useable airpower were Arc Light and TACAIR missions employing Combat Skyspot and Long Range Navigation (LORAN). While useful, this support was not as effective as the full tactical inventory under visual flight conditions.^{29/}

The steady NVA pressure, curtained from friendly airpower by dusky clouds, fog, and drizzle, was overwhelming against the relatively weak outlying bases. The first position to fall was FSB Holcomb. By 1 April, the NVA had forced the evacuation of most fire support bases, and as a consequence, friendly positions were consolidated in two separate areas: (1) Camp Carroll, Mai Loc, Cam Lo; and (2) Dong Ha and Quang Tri cities.^{30/} By 2 April, the enemy had forced the evacuation of FSBs A-2, A-4, C-1, and C-2 in the north, and FSBs Fuller, Holcomb, and Sarge in the west. Late the same day, ARVN forces surrendered Camp Carroll, located just north of Mai Loc, after intense artillery and ground attacks. With the loss of Camp Carroll and its artillery support, VNMC elements at Mai Loc were forced to withdraw toward Quang Tri City.^{31/}

Within a week, the outer fire support bases were totally overrun and the friendly units were forced back into defensive positions which were 11 KM in diameter and encompassed Dong Ha and Quang Tri Cities. RVNAF forces, supported by U.S. air strikes and naval gunfire, fought to stem the tide of the powerful enemy assault. TACAIR, however, was hampered by poor visibility. Only when the weather began to improve were VNAF and U.S. air resources able to engage enemy tank and truck columns in an attempt to stabilize the situation.^{32/}

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Although the enemy maintained steady pressure on the Dong Ha-Quang Tri area, by 5 April there was a general decrease of enemy-initiated activity. This was probably the result of the need to reposition artillery and replenish ammunition supplies. Concurrently, improved weather conditions permitted a significant increase in TACAIR strikes.^{33/}

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CHAPTER IV

PREPARATION FOR THE BATTLE FOR QUANG TRI CITY

The attack on and subsequent fall of the fire support bases in MR I caused official concern and resulted in actions designed to help defend Quang Tri City. Additional troops arrived to strengthen defenses around Dong Ha and Quang Tri, and the RVNAF conducted limited counter-offensive search operations to keep the NVA from fashioning a solid force to hurl against Quang Tri. The JGS ordered General Lam, the I Corps (MR I) Commander, to hold the defensive line at Dong Ha. With the assistance of U.S. fire support, the Saigon command was confident that government forces could stop any concerted drive on the major cities.^{34/}

One of the first actions the JGS took in MR I was to deploy forces in areas that looked especially vulnerable. Already in place, and in operational control of Quang Tri Province, was the ARVN 3d Infantry Division, supported by three battalions of the 147th VNMC Brigade and the local territorial forces, both regional and popular (RF/PF).^{35/} Joint Strategic Reserve Forces shifted north from Saigon included the 369th VNMC Brigade and the three-group task force of the RVNAF Ranger Command. In addition, the 1st Armor Brigade deployed to Quang Tri City from Camp Evans in Thua Thien Province.^{36/} In another action, the Armor Command activated the 20th Tank Regiment and deployed it under the operational control of the 3d Infantry Division to the area between Dong Ha and Cam Lo. Its mission was to clear and occupy the high ground of Route 9 and to keep

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the road open by disrupting enemy forces.^{37/} Principal VNAF support came from the VNAF 1st Air Division at Da Nang AB. That support included seven squadrons: two A-37 fighter, two O-1/U-17 liaison, and three UH-1 helicopter gunship squadrons. VNAF A-1, AC-47, and AC-119 strike sorties originated at bases outside MR I.^{38/}

In order for the USAF to provide adequate fire support to General Lam's forces, some problems had to be resolved. Progress in Vietnamization, and continued U.S. redeployments, had resulted in VNAF flying and directing the majority of air missions in MR I, virtually eliminating the tactical air control structure formerly used by U.S. forces to coordinate air and ground operations.^{39/} When the offensive began, ground units constantly requested air support from the ARVN 3d Division Headquarters. Consequently, the role of the USAF officer assigned as the VNAF Air Liaison advisor (ALO) assumed major importance. The ALO was the senior VNAF advisor to the ARVN commander and participated in all operational planning. He advised and assisted in the use of air support, development of air requests, deployment of Tactical Air Control Parties (TACPs), and transmitted to the Direct Air Support Center (DASC) all immediate requests. He also ensured adequate FAC coverage and coordinated air support with the Fire Support Coordination Center (FSCC).^{40/} With the reinitiation of large scale U.S. TACAIR operations in MR I, it became necessary for the Tactical Air Control System (TACS) to become an American operation. Thus, rather than merely advising the VNAF on aspects of air operations, the USAF advisors actually controlled the application of airpower in MR I. The existing air request

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net (see Figure 3) placed the 3d Division American ALO, Major David Brookbank, in a unique position. Because of the seriousness of the Quang Tri situation and the need for immediate action, Major Brookbank began handling air requests from all units in contact with the 3d Division's ground and air operation sections and from other U.S. field advisors. The presence of an American ALO was to be of immeasurable value as the campaign wore on.^{41/}

With the fall of the forward bases, and with the weather precluding observation aircraft from verifying the ground situation, targeting became a critical problem. The VNMC Brigades maintained a constant flow of data concerning enemy positions in their G-2 intelligence sections. This was necessary in order to formulate suitable targets for the B-52s, TACAIR Skyspot strikes, and artillery fire support. In several instances, the data which had been forwarded to the I DASC at DaNang was the basis for successfully diverting Skyspot strikes against enemy units. However, during the retreat of friendly units, the U.S. intelligence system was virtually "blind." Radio intercept stations were overrun at FSBs Sarge and Fuller. Sensor readout facilities were lost at C-1 and FSB Fuller, and the cables and antennas at the Quang Tri Combat Base (QTCB) command facilities were cut by incoming enemy artillery. In spite of such difficulties, targeting was completed and the results, though limited, were rewarding.^{42/} Because of the poor weather, the number of Skyspot and LORAN requests submitted by RVNAF units was "astronomical." The first list submitted by Major Brookbank from the 3d ARVN to I DASC

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contained 100 targets, most based on estimates and not valid intelligence. Suspected enemy troop locations were the most frequent targets described; very few pre-planned sorties were requested for hard targets.^{43/}

Another difficulty was that of securing military clearances to strike immediate targets. Primarily because of communication problems, some requests were never forwarded through ARVN channels, resulting in some targets not being struck. Ideally, the 3d ARVN staff and U.S. advisors located at the Quang Tri Citadel would pass mission requests and intelligence over the secure net to the U.S. Army Tactical Operations Center (TOC) officer at QTCB; he, in turn, would relay them to the USAF Tactical Air Control Party attached to the 3d Division for relay to I-DASC. One example of clearance difficulties which occurred on 1 April, was related by Major Brookbank:^{44/}

The freshly abandoned center bunker at FSB C-2 was being used as the NVA command post for the entire attack at this time. Gen Giai and the senior advisor wanted this target destroyed as an absolute first priority. At the time I-DASC seemed unresponsive to urgent requests for air support and seemed unaware of the seriousness of the situation. Continually pressed by 3d ARVN as to the air strike frag status, I was unable to attain the information through the land line. Finally making contact with Ramrod, the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC), we "blew our cool" and demanded the information go to the PACAF Commander-in-Chief. It's doubtful if the information got that far, but Ramrod confirmed bombs on target less than 45 minutes later which ended a total delay of 7.4 hours from initial request.

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On 2 April, one special problem on clearances to fire occurred when 7AF initiated a large scale Search and Rescue (SAR) effort, code named Bat 21, in the Cam Lo area. An EB-66 had been downed by an SA-2 missile. At first, 7AF set up a "no-fire" zone 27 km in radius which virtually encompassed the entire area of operation (AO). With enemy divisions, including heavy artillery striking in the AO, the 3d ARVN were unable to return fire or request TACAIR in the area. Eventually, some specific targets were struck by air and ground artillery, but only after considerable delay in obtaining clearance. Although the "no-fire" zone was later reduced, the area covered the center of the main NVA offensive thrust. It was through this area that the enemy moved large concentrations of artillery, tanks, and infantry. Still, the advantage to which the enemy used the fire restriction can only be estimated. It is worth noting that extensive SAR fire support was directed against enemy targets in the restricted area.^{45/}

The SAR mission was faced with new problems as a result of the NVA offensive. Because of the enemy environment, the normal SAR team could not operate effectively. As demonstrated in the Bat 21 mission, enemy artillery and weapon fire were serious threats to the slow-moving HH-53 Jolly Green helicopters, A-1 Sandy escort aircraft, and the OV-10 FACs. During the 11-day SAR effort (2 April to 13 April), SA-2 missiles downed two OV-10 FACs, and ground fire caused the loss of a Jolly Green and its entire crew.^{46/} The enemy in the SAR area now numbered in the thousands. High caliber automatic weapons and even artillery replaced the normal

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ground fire. Consequently, the enemy threat dictated several changes in tactics. The suppression of enemy fire, previously handled by A-1 aircraft in a matter of hours, now required fast moving F-4 aircraft for perhaps days. The rescue attempts of a single EB-66 crewmember required as many as 90 TACAIR strikes per day to suppress enemy fire in order to enable the Sandy and Jolly Green team to rescue the survivor.

Despite such heroic efforts, air rescue was not possible in the Bat 21 effort, and the crewmember was eventually rescued on 13 April in a daring venture by a U.S. Marine team who arranged to secure the crewmember while he was floating down the Cam Lo River in a sampan. From this retrieval location, he was transferred to an armored personnel carrier and taken to a helicopter landing zone, where he was successfully air evacuated to DaNang. ^{47/}

The ultimate rescue, although not actually accomplished by the USAF SAR team, was nonetheless a dramatic demonstration of the contributions of air resources in rescuing downed crewmembers. The Bat 21 mission, which actually included several complementary missions, was possibly the most extensive SAR effort ever attempted in SEA by 7th Air Force. In addition to the normal SAR team components, it included TACAIR, reconnaissance (RECCE), and Arc Light missions.

However, the success of the SAR effort must be weighed against the effect this mission had on the overall situation in Quang Tri Province. According to Major Brookbank, "this SAR restriction gave the enemy an opportunity unprecedented in the annals of warfare to advance at will."

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The U.S. Marine advisors shared this opinion and asserted that the USAF requirement to impose a "no-fire" zone around the downed aircraft resulted in "a critical restriction upon the defensive fire support plan all along the Cam Lo River and Mai Loc Combat Base line."^{48/}

In another instance, a SAR "no-fire" zone was established near FSB C-1 and Route 1, about 8 KM north of the Cua Viet River. This route was being heavily used by NVA tanks moving toward Dong Ha. U.S. advisors on the bridge at Dong Ha could observe the tanks moving south but were unable to fire into the zone. After 7AF lifted the restriction, the enemy was already south of the area in strength.^{49/}

Another type of "no-fire" restriction was applied when short rounds or even possible short round reports were received. On 4 April, there was a reported short round striking a Vietnamese naval station located at the mouth of the Cua Viet River. A FAC had directed naval gunfire and subsequently TACAIR against seven enemy tanks fording a river. Four tanks were destroyed and three forced into retreat to the north. I-DASC called off the strikes when it somehow received word that friendly troops were being hit. The 3d Division TACP checked with the sector TACP and RF/PF forces in the area, and learned that only one man was wounded in the engagement and that the probable cause of the casualty was from NVA tank or artillery fire. Neither the 3d Division nor territorial force command was concerned about the incident.^{50/} It is easy to see how confusion could occur concerning short rounds during the beginning of the offensive. The

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weather hampered effective FAC coverage and made it difficult to accurately identify ground situations from the air. Another factor was that the retreat patterns of friendly forces were generally disorganized or, at least, inadequately communicated to headquarters level.

Outside these "no-fire" areas, naval gunfire, coordinated with aerial fire support, struck at hostile troop concentrations and military equipment. NGF was a vital aspect of U.S. fire support. After the fall of the firebases, NGF was directed from QTCB on advancing units. U.S. Marine observers, members of the Naval Gunfire Air Spot Team, flying in VNAF L-19 Bird Dog aircraft, were able to spot for NGF by ducking through breaks in cloud cover, and by flying at extremely low and hazardous altitudes.^{51/} By 10 April, the USMC observers were transferred to DaNang AB and began flying with the USAF 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS). 7AF, upon request from MACV, agreed to furnish up to 42 OV-10 flight hours daily, weather allowing. This support by the USAF FACs provided continuous dawn-to-dusk coverage for both the 1st and 3d ARVN Division AO. Later, during the height of activity at Quang Tri City, the FACs also flew night missions when this became necessary due to the increased enemy pressure.^{52/} With the assistance of the spotters, NGF was directed against tank formations and massed enemy personnel along the beach areas. Although the coastal region was a primary target area, NGF was capable of firing inland beyond Route 1 in MR I. However, the USN destroyers and cruisers, located 5 km off the coast, began receiving heavy, though sporadic, enemy counter-fire.^{53/}

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Meanwhile, on 6 April the weather improved considerably, opening the way for increased numbers of TACAIR sorties. From this point up to and including the actual attack on Quang Tri, the NVA tended to avoid revealing their positions to TACAIR during periods of good visibility and were considerably more aggressive under cloudy skies with low ceilings.^{54/}

In several instances, the enemy took advantage of low ceilings to launch attacks in the Dong Ha area and at FSB Pedro, southwest of Quang Tri City. For instance, FSB Pedro came under heavy attacks at 0530 on 9 April by tanks and infantry when the weather prevented TACAIR strikes. Vietnamese Marines defending the base destroyed 13 enemy tanks.^{55/}

Even when air support was not available, the RVNAF "seemed to be doing better." In a strategic move during the battle, the VNMC withdrew all but a single platoon from the FSB, and, after the enemy advanced, successfully counterattacked. General Lam, Commander, MR I, was elated over the VNMC action in the FSB Pedro engagement, especially because it had been achieved without U.S. fire support.^{56/} In addition, the enemy probing actions in the Dong Ha area were contained by elements of the 3d ARVN, Ranger Command, and 1st Armored Command. Closer to Quang Tri City, the VNMC defeated enemy attempts to cut off Ai Tu Air Field and QTCB. Despite the RVNAF defensive actions, however, there was no apparent change in enemy objectives. Captured documents indicated that three regiments of the NVA 304th Division, supported by the 203d Armored Regiment and the 38th Artillery Regiment, still planned to seize Quang Tri City and set up a "Province Capital" there.^{57/}

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The decrease of enemy activity in central and eastern Quang Tri Province indicated the enemy was repositioning artillery and building up ammunition supplies. Sensors in the DMZ detected tracked vehicles near abandoned FSB A-4 and much truck movement near Khe Sanh. Movements in the A Shau Valley were the heaviest ever recorded by sensors.^{58/} USAF RF-4C photo reconnaissance missions also revealed enemy resupply efforts. In one instances, 15 tanks, 13 trucks, and one armored personnel carrier were shown moving toward Dong Ha. Reports of this type continued up to the major assault on Quang Tri City.^{59/}

To help retard this movement and to provide more accurate target planning, the 3d ARVN Division developed an Arc Light target plan that covered the entire area from Dong Ha south to Quang Tri and west to a line running south from the Cam Lo area to the Ba Long valley. Over 200 target boxes, which enabled ground commanders to request strikes by target number, were designated. Most of the Arc Light strikes were extremely effective due to many NVA concentrations and the capability for last minute target changes. On 9 April, an Arc Light strike near Dong Ha, as reported by the Province Chief, destroyed three artillery pieces and 27 tanks.^{60/}

Although the request time for targets from I-DASC to the units during this hectic period was limited, RVNAF managed to provide the necessary information. In the words of one U.S. Marine advisor:^{61/}

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The only minor problem was that it seemed the Air Force always wanted everything in fifteen minutes or less. We would get a call from DaNang (I-DASC) telling us they wanted our B-52 requests in fifteen minutes, or where were the Skyspot requests? Needless to say, it was done. We would have given them anything to continue the great support we were getting.

During this phase of the battle for Quang Tri Province, the 3d Division requested the seeding of MK-36 magnetic influence mines.^{62/} The purpose was tank area denial on three heavily traveled routes: (1) the main road network from the Ba Long Valley towards Mai Loc and Quang Tri; (2) the bridge area near Camp Carroll on route 9; and (3) the point where route 9 turns east and bends toward Cam Lo. Effective interdiction of these critical supply routes might have been able to restrict, if not totally stop, the enemy tanks. Unfortunately, most of the requests, as executed by U.S. TACAIR, utilized MK-82 bombs with the FMU-72 long-delay fuses. USAF FACs observed that the ordnance of these missions reportedly fragged with MK-36s detonated upon impact. These observations led U.S. advisors to conclude that "the FMU-72 fuse was completely useless in stopping tanks or for anything other than chance harassment." Ironically, TACAIR missions seeded an area on 13 April with the MK-36s that the 3d ARVN had not requested. In fact, "the mined area" was the center of the final objective in the ARVN counteroffensive plan slated to begin the following day. As the situation developed, NVA tanks were able to advance virtually unchecked through the routes leading to Quang Tri City.^{63/}

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Another coordination problem was the difficulty in convincing the ARVN staff that remote, suspected troop locations, troops in the open, and moving tanks were poor targets for a Skyspot strike due to the changing nature of the target, the limited availability of radar, and the amount of time required to process the mission.^{64/}

High-intensity AAA and SAM deployment threatened TACAIR and B-52 support. Never before had AAA fire been as intense in RVN. Pilots reported it to be of the same magnitude as encountered in the Hanoi area. Seventh Air Force established 12 high-threat areas in MR I during April, later raising the total to 19. (See Figure 4.) On 12 April, TAC recon photography identified three 100mm and three 85mm weapons located in an area approximately 7 NM south of the DMZ. It was believed that the NVA introduced these large-caliber weapons into RVN to increase their harassment capability against B-52s.^{65/} Also, on one day alone, the NVA launched 24 SAMs from the DMZ area at an F-4, an OV-10, a Navy A-6, and three B-52 cells.^{66/} While these SAMs were not effective, on 8 April, in the DMZ area, an SA-2 missile struck a B-52, damaging its left wing and fuselage. The aircraft aborted its mission and landed successfully at DaNang Air Base.^{67/}

Commenting on the SA-2 missile used to defend NVA troops operating south of the DMZ, Lt Col O'Gorman, Commander of the 421st Tactical Fighter Squadron (F-4 Phantom) at DaNang stated:^{68/}

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FIGURE 4

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The SA-2 missiles are a major threat for the first time ever inside South Vietnam. They [the NVA] are towing anti-aircraft guns behind trucks right down the road and then they fire SAMs at us to force us down into the anti-aircraft fire. The SAMs are firing from the DMZ area at planes across the border.

On 14 April, ARVN forces launched a series of limited counter-offensive actions. Moving west from the vicinity of Quang Tri and Dong Ha Combat Bases, ARVN forces clashed with the enemy west of Dong Ha three times, and twice near FSB Anne (south of Quang Tri City). There were also significant contacts southeast of Cam Lo and west of Ai Tu and Hai Lang Bases. Progress was slow, however, and no large scale encounters resulted. U.S. and VNAF TACAIR provided close air support;^{69/} however, the majority of the air sorties still were flown against suspected artillery positions and resupply operations.^{70/}

The pattern of cautious RVNAF probing actions continued, but friendly units made little headway against enemy concentrations. With the availability of TACAIR, it appeared that the ARVN would be able to retake lost territory and carry the battle to the enemy. Such, however, was not the case, for the ARVN often failed to take the initiative. For example, in one counteroffensive operation, the ARVN were holding a bridge to the west of Quang Tri against enemy forces. U.S. TACAIR continuously pounded the area within 300 meters of friendly troops throughout the night and with increased intensity in the morning. Then, TACAIR ceased and NGF and ARVN artillery carried on the assault. The action destroyed seven enemy tanks and forced the NVA to retreat. After this "softening up," the ARVN failed

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to take the initiative and committed only two companies of infantry and one tank troop against the enemy's two regiments. The result: an inconclusive engagement. According to Major Brookbank, "most of the ARVN plans [for the counteroffensive] would have succeeded had the ground commanders initiated action to take advantage of the massive air support provided."^{71/}

One demoralizing factor for U.S. pilots and advisors was the ARVN refusal to fire mortars in fear of revealing their position. Instead, the ARVN insisted on complete destruction of the enemy by air. As noted by one field U.S. Marine advisor: "I have found that the Vietnamese do not have a firm grasp of [the] concepts of close air support and fire support coordination. They want all the air they can get, but they do not understand the types of ordnance available nor how to employ it."^{72/} It was often the airborne FAC who effectively coordinated the application of air-power in critical combat situations.

USAF FACs did an outstanding job covering large areas and directing several strike sorties per flight in the hostile environment. The 20th TASS was responsible for the U.S. FAC (slow mover) missions in MR I. FACs controlled TACAIR strikes, conducted visual reconnaissance of the infiltration routes, directed ARVN ground artillery, and spotted for U.S. Navy vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin.^{73/} OV-10 Bronco Aircraft, call sign "Trail," flew the FAC missions in Quang Tri Province. "Bilk" FACs supported the Thua Thien area with O-2 aircraft. "Helix" O-2 operations provided FAC coverage in Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces.^{74/}

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ATS-59 Towing 100mm AAA

FIGURE 5

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In addition to the "slow-mover" FACs, F-4 Phantoms directed air strikes against enemy targets in the high threat areas of MR I. The F-4s flew at high speeds and low altitudes in areas where enemy air defenses posed serious SAM and AAA threats to slower FAC aircraft. These FAC F-4s were armed with a 20mm cannon, and equipped with rocket pods capable of firing smoke rockets to mark targets. After visual contact with a flight of strike aircraft, the FAC rolled in on the target and fired smoke rockets to mark the target area and advised the strike leader to "hit my smoke." Split second timing was required, for the strike flight zeroed in on the billowing smoke to drop ordnance as soon as the FAC cleared the target area. Because the weather often precluded visual strikes, LORAN-equipped F-4 aircraft were used to lead F-4 fighter-bombers.^{75/}

At this time in Quang Tri Province, FAC responsibilities were divided into three areas: (1) the F-4 FACs operated deep into enemy territory; (2) USAF O-2 and OV-10 aircraft ranged forward of the battle front for close interdiction; and (3) the VNAF O-1s covered the front line of battle to provide close air support for the ARVN. Unfortunately, the VNAF FACs did not fulfill their commitment. As evaluated by Major Brookbank, who was responsible for FAC coverage in the AO, the VNAF FACs "either . . . failed to go to their assigned areas or they would not make contact with the ARVN ground commander." The VNAF TACP only reported VNAF FAC positions as fraggged while in actuality the FACs were orbiting well inside friendly lines and not making contact. It was finally conceded by U.S. advisors that USAF FACs would have to be moved in to assume coverage closer to the

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forward edge of battle area (FEBA). This permitted VNAF FACs to operate inside friendly lines, thus avoiding ground fire. However, the VNAF FACs still refused to cover the FEBA and remained well to the rear, flying at an estimated altitude of 6000-7000 feet.

Consequently, USAF FACs had to assume responsibilities for complete visual reconnaissance and close air support.^{76/} As noted in one field comment:^{77/}

The Air Force FACs were highly professional and eager to help us folks on the ground. During one three day period on about 20 April when the enemy was putting about 400 rounds of artillery and hitting other positions with direct fire weapons and anti-aircraft guns, I had available through the FACs nearly unlimited close air support. We ran approximately seventy sorties against enemy positions which destroyed at least one 130mm gun with two probables, one large fuel dump, several AAA guns and positions, four 82mm mortars, and several bunker complexes. In addition, six secondary explosions were seen and heard. Some of this air support was at night under flares and extremely effective. The FACs stayed on station around the clock.

In contrast to the VNAF FAC support, VNAF A-1 TACAIR sorties performed in an exceptional manner during this time. The VNAF A-1s would contact the ground commander when necessary, worked without the VNAF FACs, and obtained outstanding results. Often, when the weather prevented other fighter aircraft strikes, the VNAF A-1 close air support was "a most critical and valuable asset."^{78/}

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In spite of the ARVN mid-April counteroffensive and the incessant TACAIR and B-52 strikes, the NVA continued to assemble forces and make preparations for heavy attacks on the cities of Dong Ha and Quang Tri. Likewise, the enemy main force elements of the NVA 324B Infantry Division continued to apply pressure against FSBs and main road nets near Hue. ^{79/}

Although enemy activity in other areas of MR I was light compared to the pressure in Quang Tri Province, it tied down RVNAF forces which could otherwise have been used to strengthen the defenses at Quang Tri. On 25 April, intelligence sources suggested that an all-out NVA attack would take place against Hue following the anticipated capture of Quang Tri. Consequently, it appeared that the RVNAF positions around Quang Tri City were in imminent danger. ^{80/}

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CHAPTER V

FALL OF QUANG TRI CITY: 27 APRIL-1 MAY

The predicted NVA push against the Dong Ha-Quang Tri area began with increased indirect artillery and mortar fire followed by tank-supported ground attacks on 27 April. The NVA had completed preliminary maneuvers that enabled them to attack from all directions. As in the opening phase of the offensive, the weather was generally unfavorable for air operations: fifty-foot ceilings severely restricted air support. Even so, General Lam declared a "tactical emergency" and requested additional TACAIR and Arc Light support.^{81/} Major Jim Joy, USMC, Senior Advisor to the VNMC 147th Brigade, described the opening attacks:^{82/}*

At 0630 in the morning of the 27th, ground attacks commenced in the 147th Brigade area of operation against the 1st Battalion and throughout the 1st Armored Brigade AO to the north (Dong Ha). The ground attacks were supported by intense 130mm artillery fire. The 1st Battalion took some 500 rounds of 82mm fire in the first two hours of the contact and beat off two ground attacks. Late on the afternoon of the 27th, the 1st and 8th Battalions were attacked by a tank infantry force from the west and southwest. Early discovery of the assault enabled organic artillery and direct support tanks to halt the attack. On the evening of the 27th, the 1st and 8th were pulled in close to the Ai Tu perimeter. Shortly before dark, most of the ammunition in the Ai Tu ammunition dump was destroyed by 130mm fire. On the morning of the 28th, 130mm artillery continued to pound the Ai Tu Combat Base.

*At 0800 on 23 April, three battalions of the 147th Brigade relieved Brigade 258 in the Ai Tu Combat Base area: the 4th Infantry Battalion had responsibility for Ai Tu perimeter security; the 1st Battalion was deployed to the southwest approximately 2-3 km; the 8th Battalion deployed to the northwest approximately 1 km.

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Rapid development of the attack generated many requests for air support and the necessity to coordinate the TACAIR with artillery fire. RVNAF elements sent their TACAIR requests to the 3d Division TOC. The TOC passed the requests to the U.S. TACP, which ensured proper coordination with I-DASC and FAC coverage. In order to effectively control the large numbers of air sorties allocated to Quang Tri, USAF FACs were assigned specific areas for interdiction or close air support as required.^{83/}

Because of the heavy combat activity, numerous conflicts resulted between gunfire and fighter patterns. It was difficult to get the ARVN artillery to stop fire to permit air strikes, and when the resumption of artillery fire was authorized, another air strike was often due. Also, the constant redeployment of batteries made accurate registration of artillery impossible.^{84/}

The battle situation deteriorated on 28 April as friendly forces, including elements from Dong Ha, withdrew to within 5 km of the Quang Tri Citadel in defensive actions. By 1550 on the 28th, friendly units had retreated even further, to the northern edge of Quang Tri Combat Base, two and one-half miles northwest of Quang Tri. In heavy fire support actions, friendly artillery, tanks, and U.S. Army Cobra helicopter gunships destroyed 17 enemy tanks. As usual, enemy ground forces were supported by tanks, heavy artillery, and mortar fire.^{85/}

The problem of controlling up to 200 close air support sorties per day around the clock continued to pose a challenge to the tactical air control

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system. In order to prevent chaos, it was imperative that FAC coverage be maintained in the immediate battle area to direct air against tank attacks and in troops in contact (TIC) situations. Often, when the U.S. TACP responded to urgent calls by diverting a FAC and one or two sets of TACAIR, it was discovered that the ground commander only suspected tanks and desired a FAC to check the location. USAF FACs were dispersed throughout the entire area and generally did not have sufficient time to conduct visual reconnaissance before responding to divert calls.^{86/} The alertness of the FACs, however, was frequently demonstrated. For example:^{87/}

On 28 April, the ARVN TOC commander gave clearance to a USAF FAC to direct strikes against tanks without ARVN marker panels located south of QTCB. The FAC was hesitant since the tanks were in the open and not actively hostile. The tanks were eventually identified as friendly. At other times, forward elements of an ARVN unit would report tanks and enemy advancing which FACs later confirmed as old destroyed hulks.

Enemy troops began their final advance on Quang Tri City at 0230 on 29 April. Frontal attacks commenced at 0315, and the situation became critical. ARVN forces, supported by VNAF and U.S. TACAIR, repeatedly repelled assaults while inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. One report described the attacks:^{88/}

The enemy launched a tank and infantry attack on the north end of the bridge heading into Quang Tri City. The attack originated from the west and quickly pushed back the defending ARVN 2d Regiment elements. The 18th Armored Cavalry fought well and held the enemy on the north side of the bridge as all RVNAF units

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retreated. Then, in a timely and devastating TACAIR operation, a FAC using flare light directed strike after strike on the enemy. The attack was beaten off and resulted in five enemy destroyed tanks.

In an effort to counter the aggressiveness of air strikes, the NVA introduced a new air defense weapon in MR I. On 29 April, the NVA fired a Soviet STRELA (SA-7) missile at an F-4 aircraft north of Quang Tri City. Operated by ground troops against any low level flight operations at low or moderate speed, the SA-7 posed a serious threat to FACs and to helicopters flying SAR missions in MR I.^{89/} It was necessary for aircraft to develop evasive maneuvers, including the use of flares to decoy the missile once launch was detected. The usual countermeasure employed was an evasive maneuver involving a hard turn or a turn into the exhaust flight path such that the aircraft would cover its own IR signature.^{90/}

Peculiar to MR I was another danger to the slow-moving FACs. The ARVN often failed to fire illumination rounds at the altitude requested by U.S. advisors and FACs. Instead of 3000 feet, the ARVN artillery fired flares at 6000 feet, 2000 feet above the FAC's altitude. The result: intense 23, 37, and 57mm AAA fire directed at the FAC aircraft as it appeared in silhouette against the brilliant flares.^{91/}

On the morning of 29 April, with the battle line two to three km outside the city, Brigadier General Thomas W. Bowen, USA, Deputy Senior Advisor to MR I, estimated that Quang Tri was threatened by the equivalent of four NVN divisions, about 40,000 men, who outnumbered government forces three

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to one.^{92/} Two known enemy regiments, with about 30 tanks, were deployed northwest of the city; two regiments with 20 tanks were to the southwest; and one or two regiments, with an unknown number of tanks, were located to the southeast.^{93/} By nightfall, the situation was bleak, and General Giai, ARVN 3d Division Commander, issued evacuation orders at 2125 hours. However, General Lam, Corps Commander, rescinded the order at 2300 hours the same day.^{94/}

As the combat activity surged towards Quang Tri City, refugee foot and vehicular traffic congested the highways leading to Hue. The first and largest group of refugees assembled in Quang Tri City early on 29 April and then moved approximately six miles south on Route 1, to the vicinity of Hai Lang District Town. (See Figure 2.) At this point, the convoy came under attack by NVA direct and indirect fire. Lead vehicles were stopped immediately, and mass confusion ensued.^{95/} Although three quarters of the people in the convoy were civilians, 95 percent of the vehicles in the column were military; the majority were two and one-half ton trucks plus a considerable number of flatbeds, tankers, small trucks, jeeps, and 15 ambulances. There were also a few ARVN tanks and armored personnel carriers. Hundreds of motorcycles and bicycles contributed to making the road impassable once the firing began. More than 500 four-wheeled vehicles were destroyed during the debacle. MR I Red Cross officials placed the death toll at 2000, including women, children, and elderly and sick evacuees from Quang Tri hospitals.^{96/}

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The convoy tragedy was reflective of the disintegration of command and control occurring in Quang Tri City. The ARVN 3d Division was rapidly losing control of the situation as evidenced by their failure to organize flank security for the refugee column. The enemy took full advantage of the situation and inflicted a defeat whose psychological effect was instrumental in triggering mass retreat among the remaining 3d Division units and also led to an exodus of civilians out of Hue in the days to follow.

On 30 April, amid sustained enemy bombardment and ground attacks, VNMC elements began the evacuation of QTCB, located across the river from Quang Tri City. Unfortunately, ARVN engineers, in a moment of panic, destroyed the Quang Tri Bridge before the Marines had completed their withdrawal. As a result, TACAIR had to be called in to complete the destruction of abandoned friendly artillery pieces and tanks. Additional air strikes and NGF were used in the destruction of POL dumps and ammo storage areas.^{97/} During the night of 30 April, the situation worsened. By 2300 hours, the RVNAF abandoned all territory north of Quang Tri City. During the day, over 4500 rounds of artillery and rocket fire fell on the city.^{98/}

By the morning of 1 May, the Marines still held the west side of the city with the Ranger and 20th Tank elements to the south. All other ARVN resistance north, east, and west of the Citadel had disappeared. U.S. advisors continued to coordinate TACAIR and NGF, but, unfortunately, adverse weather conditions prevented effective air support, and, consequently, enemy armor assaults continued.^{99/}

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Refugee Convoy

FIGURE 6

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By 1200, Gen Giai considered the situation hopeless. Attempts to break out of the Citadel to join Marine and Ranger units 1200 meters to the south were unsuccessful. After receiving information that 10,000 additional rounds of enemy artillery fire were forecast, General Gaia issued evacuation orders for a second time. The ARVN evacuation plan called for the 1st Armored Brigade, 1st, 4th, and 5th Ranger Groups, and 57th ARVN Regiment to attempt to push south on Route 1. Brigade 147 (VNMC) was directed to escort the 3d ARVN Division Headquarters south to link up with Brigade 369 (VNMC) north of the My Chanh River. The remaining tanks and armored personnel carriers would move in the center of the column with the Division Staff. ^{100/}

The emergency evacuation of U.S. and ARVN personnel from the Quang Tri Citadel, already a hazardous operation, was complicated by a rapid disintegration of the ARVN command and control structure. This collapse resulted in the total loss of communication among the remaining RVNAF combat units and placed the lives of American advisors within the Citadel in jeopardy. Completely cut off, U.S. advisors and ARVN Headquarters personnel remained in the Citadel. ^{101/}

Seventh Air Force agencies Blue Chip, the Joint Rescue and Coordination Center (JRCC), and I-DASC coordinated a SAR evacuation plan for the besieged defenders in the Citadel. The original pickup zone selected by I-DASC was an open field 1000 yards from the Citadel, but enemy pressure required the pickup point to be altered to the more secure Citadel heli-port.

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