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1. When were you first told about the great offensive? Who told you? News about the general offensive was quite ambiguous. Actually, we didn't hear anything about it until the last minute, just before our unit moved to attack Saigon. Five days before Tet (about 25, 26 January) all the cadres and fighters in the battalion were rounded up and told about the balance of strength between the Front and the GVN. The battalion cadres concluded that: "The once-in-a-thousand-year chance has come. This is the most convenient time for all the fighters and all the people to rise up and take over the Government, end the war, and bring about peace to the country." Since October 1967, however, we company and platoon cadres had been indoctrinated about the "new mission" in order to react on time with the "new situation." The cadres told us clearly that the new mission might be fighting in the city, and that city might be Saigon. Later, on 7 December 1967 the 2d Regt sent two battalions -- the 267th Bn and the 269th Bn -- to attack the town of Hau Nghia in order to draw experience on the tactics of attacking a town. After the battle, all the battalion cadres went to the Region Headquarters, perhaps to receive new directives, while the rest of the men rested and recuperated their strength. On the afternoon of the last day of the year (29 January) all the men were getting ready to celebrate Tet in Long An, as they were suddenly ordered to move on. We walked all night on New Year's Eve, and all day on the first day of Tet, and finally we stopped in a village near Saigon (I don't know the name of the village) and waited for the order. The commander of the 269th Bn named Ut Thu (a 35-year old Southerner) personally delivered the news:
"This year, we're going to celebrate Tet in Saigon. Our mission today is to attack and take over the Tan-Son-Nhut Airbase with special attention paid to the Phi-Long Barrack. The 267th Bn has the responsibility of taking over the Vinatexco Textile Mill and using it as a springboard to launch attacks on the division headquarters of the ARVN paratroopers in order to cover us. Our 269th Bn will launch a three-prong attack. Each company will be in charge of a prong. We'll combine forces with the City Sapper Unit...." My task was to lead a platoon, taken from the 3d Co. We were supposed to deploy ourselves at Route 10 and see to it that the rest of the battalion passed through the Ba Queo-Nga Tu Bay Hien crossroad safely on their way to attack the Phi Long Barrack. After receiving the directives, the whole battalion remained in the village waiting for night-fall, when the commo-liaison agents would come to take us to the target area.

2. What were you told about the purpose of this offensive?
The purpose of the operation was to take over the Tan-Son-Nhut Airbase at any cost within 24 hours, or 48 hours at most. We were supposed to hold on to the target area, and in no circumstance should we withdraw. After 48 hours, we would be given new orders, and would know what to do. Since the time was drawing short, the battalion cadres could only tell us briefly about a few targets which we had to know. We didn't have a chance to discuss the purpose of the operation. The order was for us to open fire before 3 AM on the second day of Tet (January 31).

3. How did you feel personally about this plan?
From what I heard from the battalion commander before the attack, I thought the plan was perfect, with us combining forces with the city sapper units and the City Penetration Agents and everything! The battalion cadres, however, warned the companies about the difficulties which might occur such as the death of the commo-liaison agents, or the combat units getting lost in the strange terrain. Being confident in what the cadres said about the favorable situation, I was eighty percent sure that my mission would be accomplished. I ordered the men in each squad to stay close together and avoid spreading themselves thin even if they were caught in fierce fighting, so as to avoid getting lost. At no time should they run into the dead-end streets because of the possibility of being encircled. What happened afterward was completely contrary to what I had anticipated.

4. Did you discuss this plan with your comrades?
I didn't discuss anything with my comrades in the unit about the combat plan. First, it was because I was confident that the plan was perfect and that we'd be successful, and thus there was no need for further discussion. Secondly, discussion would take too much time, and we didn't have any time to waste. A number of fighters, however, worried about their not knowing the way around in Saigon. As they had to depend on the commo-liaison guides, they were afraid they might get into deadly troubles if the guides were killed or lost.
5. How did your unit prepare for the offensive?
My company didn't make any preparation or have any additional training especially for this attack on Saigon. We took along only a two-day supply of fried rice. We were determined to "take over our target areas and therefore no plan for withdrawal was drawn up in advance." We were assured, however, of reinforcements within 24 hours. Most of the men weren't bothered about the absence of a withdrawal plan. They were enthusiastic and confident about their victory, except for a few men who were worried about getting lost in the city.

6. Where were you during the offensive? What were your duties and activities at this time?
As I've told you earlier, I led a platoon of 29 men, armed with AK-50s, three B-40s, one B-41, and three RPDs (Chinese made automatic rifle). We deployed on Route 10 near the Ba Queo area to cover for the battalion while it passed through the Nga Tu Bay Hien crossroad. We were supposed to launch an attack on the rear of the Phi Long Barrack. As soon as we got to the city limit, the underground organizations in the city sent commo-liaison men to guide us to our target areas. The 269th Bn was ordered to take over the Phi Long Barrack by 5 AM. When my battalion opened fire on its target at 4 AM, I was still on Route 10 instead of attacking the rear of the Phi-Long Barrack as planned because our commo-liaison agents hadn't shown up to take us there. We waited and waited until 8 AM on January 21, still no commo-liaison showed up. In our confusion, we forced two local youths to show us the way to the Ba Queo area. In Ba Queo, I let the two youths go home, and broke into a house, forced two other youths to take us to Tan-Son-Nhut Airbase. These two boys were frightened. They had to lead us to the base. They knew the way, but they had no idea what might happen on the way to the base. I thought it over and decided to stay in the Ba Queo area, mingle in the people's houses and wait for night-fall to launch our attack. I spent all day trying to make an assessment of the situation. I found that our VC units had failed to get the situation under control. The people either ran away or barred their doors to the VC troops. Our commo-liaison agents didn't seem to know the way around themselves, and thus had ruined our plan. We couldn't contact our fifth columnists, and thus didn't know where our target was supposed to be. While we were caught in confusion in the Ba Queo area, we heard from the people that almost all the VC units were crushed near the airbase and in front of the Joint General Staff headquarters. Later in the day, more disappointing news was heard from the people. Radio Saigon still broadcast. Helicopters strafed continuously. Our targets were untouched. The operation was a complete failure. I still had hope, however, about the reinforcements which the cadres had promised to send to us in 24 hours. As we failed to take over our targets in 24 hours, we expected to do so when reinforcements came and helped us reverse the situation before the hour time limit had expired. I waited up anxiously for rein-
forcements to show up, but at 4 AM, they were still nowhere in sight. I was terribly afraid and decided to find a way to escape. I knew the tide had turned against us, and I'd be killed if I hesitated. At 6 AM on February 1, I told the men to stay where they were while I went out to study the roads and to look for our commo-liaison agents. I took along an M-79 and a K-66. As soon as I reached the road, I hid the guns in the gutter, and followed the people who were running away to take refuge at the Thanh Tam Catholic School. I didn't really know where they were heading, but I followed them anyway. Most of the people in this area were Catholic, and so they ran toward this school. At the Thanh Tam School, I kept thinking and calculating. I decided that I wouldn't be able to get away because I was a total stranger in the area, and even if I could escape and get back to the VC-controlled areas, I'd be executed by them. So I decided to approach the school officials and asked them to help me to rally to the GVN. The school officials called the Capital Special Sector headquarters. At 2 PM on the same day, I was taken to the proper authorities. I told them I was a transportation laborer and my job was to carry ammo for the VC. The reason why I lied being my belief in the VC propaganda that the GVN would liquidate all the low and middle-ranking ralliers. Later, I was taken to the Gia-Dinh J-2. I was well treated wherever I went, and finally I decided to tell the truth. I led the J-2 officials to the place where I hid my weapons. I was later sent to the Thu Duc Chieu Hoi Center, and then to the Saigon Center to attend an indoctrination session before getting processed to go home. I'm happy I've been able to escape the bombing and shelling.

7. Could you describe any of the VC organizations in the cities which played a role in the offensive?

The VC City Penetration Agents were of no help for my unit whatsoever, except for leading us from the city limit to the Ba Queo area, and leaving us there confused and lost. Our most important mission was to combine forces with the city sapper units to carry out our attacks. Yet from the beginning to the end, they were nowhere in sight. The city organizations were trusted with the most important task of providing commo-liaison agents, and to help the troops contact the sapper units, yet they didn't fulfill their task.

8. Did the population help the VC in any way?

The people were too afraid. None of them supported us in any way. Wherever we went, the people were frightened. They'd immediately bar their door, and not a soul dared show up in the street. In some places, the local people weren't aware of our presence. They stood on their doorstep discussing the situation with their neighbors. When they became aware of our presence, they'd disperse, each to his own house. Then we had to break into their houses and force them to give us shelter. We felt disappointed to be greeted with fear and indifference.

9. Would you say that the offensive as a whole was a success for the VC, a failure, or something in between?
The VC troops suffered heavy losses, but they've used their blood to buy a precious lesson on how to fight in the cities. The VC had launched attacks on Hau Nghia to draw experience, but Hau Nghia was quite different from Saigon. The reasons for the VC failure in the last offensive were: 1/ Lack of support from the people, 2/ Poor combat techniques when it came to fighting in the city, 3/ Lack of coordination between the VC, City Penetration Agents and the regular troops, 4/ The cadres' and fighters' ignorance of the target areas. They got lost and didn't know their way around in Saigon.

10. What effects did the offensive have on the VC's and the GVN's position in the rural areas?

I think the GVN has become even more determined to fight the Communists after this VC fiasco. As for the VC, although they failed in the Tet offensive, they will still hold on to their plan to take over the whole of South Vietnam. How they'll go about doing so (by military or by political means) I don't know. Right now I'm not at all informed about the situation in the rural areas. I don't know how the last offensive affected the GVN and the VC positions in the countryside. Before launching the offensive, the VC, however, had assured the people that the war would be ended by the beginning of 1968, although they didn't mention their offensive plan. The people were asked to contribute material and manpower to the VC effort. The contributions were extraordinarily heavy. The people had to give away half of their earnings, and they all -- men and women -- were asked to do labor duty, preparing the battlefields. Now that the VC have failed, the people in the rural areas will no doubt lose confidence in the Front. Without the support of the people, the VC cannot function effectively. Tax collection will surely become a problem for the VC. Another disaster for the VC was their over-confidence in the outcome of their offensive. Now that they've failed, they don't know how to explain their failure to the people.

11. Did the U.S. or the GVN gain anything from this offensive?

Thanks to the VC Tet offensive, the U.S. and GVN troops gained a glorious military victory. Furthermore, invaluable knowledge about the true strength of the Front was also gained, because the VC mustered all their strength in this great offensive. The offensive also woke the U.S. and GVN up to the reality that big and important cities such as Saigon, Hue, Nha Trang, Dalat, etc., were not out of reach for the VC, and therefore the cities need more security measures against future surprise attacks. The GVN's political victory was the fact that the offensive has brought the people and the government closer to each other than ever before in their anti-Communist stand. The losses the GVN has to suffer as a result of the offensive were the expenses it had to bear to rebuild the destroyed structures such as buildings and bridges, and helping the victims.

12. What activities of the U.S. and GVN were particularly effective against the VC?
While serving in the VC combat units, I found that the most effective activities were the helicopter operations. Whenever the helicopters were overhead, we all had to lie still. Jet bombers were also dangerous but it was possible to avoid getting hurt by them, because they always circled around at least once before bombing, and thus we had time to change our positions. The most ineffective activities in this anti-VC war were the use of artillery and air strike on a target area to prepare the way for ground troop operations. Such preparation served as a notice to the VC. They'd get ready to fight back if they had enough strength, and they'd disperse and run away if they were under strength.

13. What did you expect would be the popular reaction to the VC offensive?

From what we learned from the cadres five days before Tet about the balance of strength between the VC and the GVN, we were informed that the GVN situation had deteriorated to its roots. Most of the men and I were confident in the support of the people. We anticipated at least sixty percent of the people would rise up and take part in the offensive. Things actually happened to the contrary. The people in the capital were totally indifferent to us. None of them were enthusiastic about our offensive, let alone taking part in a general uprising. Wherever the VC troops went, the people evacuated the areas. Facing the cruel reality, we all felt surprised to find that our cadres had misled us about the general situation, desperate because we were trapped in a dead end street and might be killed anytime.

14. What did you think the effects of the attack would be on the ARVN and the GVN?

Before the offensive, I thought that the ARVN and the GVN would be subdued after half a day of fierce attack by our troops. The VC had launched all their strength in the attack of Saigon. They failed and lost all their prestige among the people. They succeeded however, in letting the ARVN and the GVN know that Saigon was not out of their reach. I didn't see any ARVN soldiers or GVN officials desert to join the VC. I saw only VC cadres and fighters desert their ranks to rally to the GVN. My unit was given the order to kill anyone who opposed us -- including civilians, and to kill all the ralliers on the spot. My unit didn't kill anyone, however. In mid-December 1967, when attacking the town of Hau Nghia, a squad of ARVN rangers walked over to surrender to us. They were under the command of an American Negro sergeant, and were combining forces with an ARVN infantry platoon. After exploiting all the necessary military information from them, we turned them over to the local Military Section. I don't know what became of them after we left.
15. Is the GVN doing anything now to strengthen its position?
   I haven't had a chance to look around and find out if the GVN is doing anything to strengthen its position. If I were allowed to express my opinion, I'd suggest that the GVN increase its recon force, and try to master the situation. By getting a military upper hand, the GVN would automatically get the political upper hand and gain the people's confidence. The GVN should also make an effort to annihilate all the VC's Village Party Chapter Committees because they are the Front's eyes and ears, and they are the source of supply and maintenance of the VC Main Force. Without the Village Party Chapter Committees, the Main Force wouldn't be able to function effectively since no one would provide it with regional intelligence, it wouldn't be able to prepare the ground operation, it wouldn't get any food supply, etc. In my opinion, increase in troop strength will not necessarily guarantee victory. The most important thing is to improve the cadres' spirit.

16. How do you feel about the war?
   This is a complicated ideological war between the Communist Bloc and the Free World. I think it'll drag on indefinitely until both sides wear out and have to stop temporarily to talk peace. The reason I say "temporarily" is because of my awareness that the Communists are determined to take over the South and bring about reunification when they feel strong enough to do so. In the last Tet offensive, the VC thought they could bring the war to an end by attacking by surprise. The failure of such a large-scale operation must have taxed the VC strength a great deal. If they didn't talk peace now, they'd be forced to return to their guerrilla warfare tactics. Returning to guerrilla warfare wouldn't serve the VC any good, because they'll have difficulty motivating the people to support them and heighten their revolutionary movement. In the last four years, the people have listened too much to the VC exaggerated propaganda. They have all become disillusioned now.

17. Have the VC cadres said anything about the effects of the offensive?
   None of us VC cadres had a chance to discuss the effects of the offensive for the very simple reason that we lost touch with each other right from the beginning of the offensive. On New Year's Eve, while waiting for the comrade liaison to show up and lead us to the city limit, we company cadres sat down to eat our supper together, and some joked: "Tomorrow we'll launch our attacks as planned. Anyone who lets himself get killed is a fool. How can he be sure that his family will be honored?" Such words reflected the worry in the men's hearts.

18. Do you know what has become of your unit now?
   Since my rally, I've had no news of my 269th Bn. From what I learned from the newspapers and the television (while I was in the J-2 office in Gia Dinh) about the outcome of the
attacks on the Tan Son Nhut Airbase, the 269th Bn suffered heavy losses of lives. I found the men's sacrifice meaningless and useless. I'm quite sure that after such a defeat, the 269th Bn would be forced to retreat to its base camp in Hau Nghia to recuperate and to get more replacements. I don't know if all the VC underground organizations in the capital have been rooted up, but I guess any organization which has not been discovered wouldn't dare operate actively. According to the VC rules, they had to disperse and spread thinly about to avoid detection. Once they were scattered, it'd be hard to contact them.

19. The offensive has been called a "suicide operation" or the "last gasp." What do you think of such terms?

The VC Tet offensive wasn't a suicide operation or a last gasp. The VC never act foolishly. They always calculate carefully their advantages and their risks. The VC had anticipated a 90 percent success from this offensive. They suffered defeat because they had too much confidence in the underground and relied too much on their intelligence. All the Main Force units taking part in the offensive found themselves in strange combat terrain. They didn't know their way around. Their combat tactics had not been carefully studied, and therefore they lacked coordination with their friendly units.

20. Do you think the VC have the strength to mount another such offensive, or even several?

I think the VC still have the military ability to launch several big offensive attacks. But they'd attack and destroy the targets and then withdraw, and wouldn't plan to hold on to the target areas as they had in the last offensive. The VC armed forces are still very significant. Right now, each province has at least two regular battalions without counting the local forces. Besides, the Main Force units of the various divisions and secret zones have been strengthened every day by the North. Ample supplies of modern weapons were provided to those units. If the U.S. and the GVN fail to stop the infiltration of troops and weapons from the North, the threat of an offensive as big as the last one would always be valid, and we ought to be always on the alert.