Battle for An Loc

5 April - 26 June 1972 (U)

HQ PACAF
Directorate, Tactical Evaluation
CHECO Division
Battle for An Loc

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FOREWORD

THE battle for An Loc may well prove to be a classic study in the use of tactical airpower in the years to come. It was an interlude in the Vietnam War where COSVN, confident in its own strength, introduced "a true conventional strategy for the first time," employing armor, artillery, and infantry. The Seventh Air Force entered the battle basing its strategy and tactics on the assumption that a relatively permissive environment would exist for aircraft operation. Both were mislead. That the Seventh Air Force was able to adjust to the unexpected, and succeed, clearly demonstrates the need for flexible ideas and varied weaponry in both conventional and unconventional war.

The immediate impact of the battle was to end the VC/NVA invasion thrust into Military Region III by decimating the enemy units participating in the struggle for An Loc. In the view of General John W. Vogt, Commander of Seventh Air Force, the VC/NVA inability to make up for losses sustained there resulted in COSVN's failure to take or to even seriously threaten Saigon. Thus the VC/NVA loss involved more than the failure to take a provincial capital that had far more psychological than military significance. The effective loss of three crack divisions, however, signaled the end of the possibility for any serious inroads into Military Region III during the Spring and Summer offensive of 1972.
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**UNCLASSIFIED**
INTRODUCTION

In South Vietnam where reliance upon supernatural signs is a way of life, it might have been noted that at the juncture of Tay Ninh and Binh Long Provinces, the Cambodian border probes deeply east and south like some sinister finger pointing into the center of Binh Long Province. An Loc, capital and nerve center of Binh Long ("Peaceful Dragon") Province, is small but holds an important political and military position astride Highway 13. This highway, obscured by the heavy canopy of a rain forest once populated by tigers and elephants, winds out of Cambodia to Loc Ninh and then follows an abandoned railroad bed into An Loc before dropping 76 kilometers further south into Saigon. Scattered throughout this rolling province on both sides of the highway are huge rubber plantations of up to 75,000 acres containing some of the finest rubber in the world. These stands of rubber trees provide about 1/3 of South Vietnam's total exports as well as protection for ambushers crouched behind the trees to intercept the exposed highway. It was here that the "Peaceful Dragon" was to shudder with the thunder of war during the battle for An Loc—a chapter of the NVA Spring and Summer Offensive in 1972.

For months prior to the attack in Binh Long Province, allied leaders had expected a series of attacks throughout Vietnam. Drawing on previous experience, many observers predicted that the initial attacks were likely during the TET Lunar New Year's celebration in February. Some South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) commanders suggested that March was perhaps a
better estimate. In any event, ARVN and American leaders agreed that attacks were imminent and began a coordinated series of actions on enemy base camp, supply, and assembly areas in an effort to forestall or at least blunt any determined enemy offensive. While principal attacks were anticipated in Military Regions (MR) I and II, limited activity was also expected in the western part of MR III.

Movement of the VC 5th, 9th and NVA 7th Divisions to the border area north of Tay Ninh Province, coupled with Communist propaganda stressing the importance of Tay Ninh, seemed to indicate that it was the enemy's primary objective. Subsequent action demonstrated that Tay Ninh, although a logical choice, was only a diversion, and that the enemy had chosen Highway 13 through An Loc as its main route to Saigon. The subject of this study is the NVA attempt to seize An Loc and the role of air power in thwarting the NVA's efforts to gain its principal objective in MR III.

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On the night of 31 March/1 April, a series of actions in Tay Ninh Province tended to confirm earlier speculation that the VC/NVA offensive in MR III was to focus there. The key action occurred at Fire Support Base (FSB) Lac Long, seven miles north of Thien Ngon, where a six hundred round rocket and mortar barrage was followed by a ground assault. The ARVN infantry repulsed the attack and found 151 enemy bodies around the perimeter of the installation. The plan of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) seemed clear—FSB Lac Long guarded the approach to Tay Ninh City along Highway 22, a major artery leading from the city to Route 1 and Saigon. If COSVN could capture FSB Lac Long, their forces would be able to begin a drive directly into the capital.\(^6^\)

The next two nights saw continuing action in Tay Ninh Province, especially in the vicinity of FSB Lac Long. On the night of 1/2 April, more indirect fire hit the outpost. Again, hostile ground forces attacked and a tank appeared at the main gate shell ing the installation. Aircraft were scrambled and indications were that the tank was destroyed. Relief of the defense forces was short-lived, however, because the ARVN command confirmed that at least six hostile tanks, including U.S. model M-41s, were still operating in the area. On the following night, the VC/NVA again poured over six hundred rounds of mixed fire into the fire base. Following the barrage, three tanks led a determined infantry attack that broke into
the center of the installation causing the ARVN defenders to fall south to the Trai B1 area. Defense positions here would attempt to hold the VC/NVA back from Tay Ninh City. Although the Allied Command did not realize it at the time, the battle for An Loc had begun.

After the ARVN withdrew from FSB Lac Long, the entire area surrounding it was left devoid of friendly forces. Besides leading the ARVN command to believe that Tay Ninh City was the objective, the VC/NVA had severely hampered allied intelligence gathering in the area. USAF Forward Air Controllers (FACs) and remnants of the U.S. Army's 1st Air Cavalry were spread so thinly that little definite information became known concerning the location of the three VC/NVA divisions seen earlier just north of Tay Ninh Province in Cambodia. In addition, other sources of information were sparse and any evidence contrary to ARVN assumptions, rare. One exception was a document containing information on artillery and mortar units and mentioning positions near Loc Ninh and An Loc. This document, found on the body of a dead cell leader, must have seemed spurious in the light of so much contradictory evidence.

While the attention in MR III was drawn to Tay Ninh, the VC/NVA had begun to put their master plan, "The Nguyen Hue Campaign," into effect. It developed that the seizure of FSB Lac Long was only a screening action to enable the VC 9th Division to move undetected into Base Area 708, northwest of An Loc and within easy striking distance of any point within Binh Long Province. COSVN targeted the 9th Division against An Loc itself.
Military Region 3 and Capital Special Zone

FIGURE 2

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III MR Major Road Net and Airfields

FIGURE 3

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The NVA 7th Division was to stop reinforcements and supplies from reaching An Loc from Saigon by cutting Highway 13 south of An Loc, between Chon Thanh and Lai Khe. The VC 5th Division was to initiate the offensive by capturing Loc Ninh, a district capital north of An Loc on QL 13, and afterwards to move through Cambodia to Route 1 and Saigon.

Scattered incidents continued throughout MR III after the fall of FSB Lac Long, but no clear pattern emerged to the ARVN indicating the role Binh Long Province was to play in the VC/NVA plans. As late as 4 April, the ARVN high command authorized the redeployment of three ranger groups from Tay Ninh to Phu Bai in MR I. This action was met with approval by those who argued that incidents occurring in MR III were only VC/NVA attempts to tie down government forces thus preventing reinforcement of more critical areas.

In the early morning hours of 5 April, the VC/NVA launched major attacks in previously quiet Binh Long Province. An Loc began to receive indirect fire and a hostile ground force threatened Quan Loi Airfield, located approximately seven kilometers northeast of An Loc. Almost from the inception of the attack, the situation at the airfield looked grim. Because of the size of the opposing force, USAF and VNAF helicopters evacuated 138 special forces defenders including eight Americans because the site was considered "less defensible" than An Loc or Loc Ninh. The two remaining ARVN infantry companies were unable to secure the airstrip, ending even helicopter activity at that location. The position soon fell.
Loc Ninh, a little settlement of 4000 Montagnards and South Vietnamese "with little political, economic, or military importance" received the major thrust of the attack that morning. Heralded by scores of shells from howitzers, rockets, and long range artillery pieces, at least two regiments, supported by tanks, attacked in mass at 0530.

Throughout the day, the enemy pressed ground attacks from the west, southwest, and northwest. The defenders, isolated in two compounds at either end of the town, along a small airstrip, aided the FACs in directing the massive TACAIR effort.

Throughout the day and into the evening, the ground forces continued to pressure the two compounds. All of their attacks were beaten back, largely by U.S./VNAF TACAIR and gunships. Enemy casualties mounted rapidly, "mostly killed by air (KBA)." In spite of this heavy air support, the VC/NVA moved close to the compounds. By 2330 Captain "Zippo" Smith, an American adviser in one of the compounds, cleared a Spectre AC-130 gunship to fire inside his compound. The following morning Loc Ninh still had not fallen. Major General James T. Hollingsworth, Commanding General, Third Regional Assistance Command (TRAC), told General Creighton Abrams, COMUSMACV, that the town would have fallen early on 5 April had it not been for the "magnificent support of the 7th Air Force and the brilliant direction of a young Army captain, Smith."
The following day brought no relief from the hostile fire and attacks by the VC/NVA. By noon, at least three major ground assaults had been stopped by TACAIR and gunship fire. From the viewpoint of the ground commanders, the air support provided was outstanding in every way. Major General Hollingsworth told of one afternoon assault when the enemy troops tried to cross the runway from east to west and were scattered by "well placed CBU strikes." When the enemy tried to get through the defenses on the east side of the command post compound, gunships "slaughtered" them in the wires. He estimated that the "better part" of the VC regiment operating on the west side of Loc Ninh had been "blown away by TACAIR strikes."

While the air support was satisfying to the ground command, some of the pilots operating over Loc Ninh made comments suggesting two operational problem areas. The pilot of one AC-130 Spectre wrote angrily at being permitted to fire for a brief time and then being shouldered aside waiting for higher priority TACAIR to expend. Wave after wave of TACAIR appeared with the result that this pilot did not get to fire again on that mission. In his view, the control system was "saturated by airpower." The USAF FAC on this mission recalled later that this Spectre just could not have done the damage to the enemy that heavy bombs and napalm were obviously doing. Although the Spectre pilot's comments were born of frustration and, in this case probably not justified, they were an early indication of command and control problems to develop at An Loc.  

A second comment on the use of air power related to the introduction of new
systems into the theater without familiarizing control and operating elements of the weapons' capabilities. When one Spectre pilot told his FAC that his Spectre's flare launcher was broken, the FAC assumed that the Spectre could not fire and told him to return to base. When the pilot quickly assured the FAC that his aircraft was still operational, the FAC permitted him to work the target, but the point was that this FAC did not know the gunship's capabilities even though he was responsible for guiding the Spectre in using its weaponry.

While the battle raged on the ground, the government of South Vietnam and the ARVN command had problems arise as well. Due to the multiplicity of actions all over South Vietnam, reinforcements in large numbers were not immediately available for Loc Ninh. And, even if they had been, mass transportation by slow moving aircraft would have been perilous at best. By noon of the sixth, the total reinforcements for Loc Ninh--three ARVN companies--were in place. On the political side, the Saigon government officials expressed "official concern" and ordered the Saigon police on "full alert."

Early in the morning of 7 April, the VC/NVA again launched massive attacks against the four companies of ARVN remaining in the two compounds. Manpower for the attack was drawn from an estimated 6,500 enemy troops of the 5th and 9th Divisions stationed in Binh Long Province, but concentrated around An Loc. Supported by 75mm recoilless rifle and 122mm rocket fire and spearheaded by tanks, human "wave upon wave" attacks flowed and
ebbed near the compounds under the damming firepower from TACAIR units.  
In spite of this aerial support, it appeared to the crews in the air that the situation looked "grim" for the people in the compound." If someone didn't "get the men out before nightfall" they would be overrun "for sure." In the compound at the south end of the runway, the situation became so desperate that the two Americans called in air strikes "directly on top of their own compound" in a final effort to stop the attack. By 0800, the position was overrun and Captain Smith, already dazed by a mortar round, was presumably captured while talking to General Hollingsworth on the radio.

As of 1630, some ARVN units in the north compound area were just barely holding on but hostile forces were moving virtually at will throughout the area. Resistance to a total takeover was coming entirely from a variety of air strikes including gunships. Finally at about 1830, as the camp was being completely engulfed by hostile forces, many personnel in the north compound escaped the area and fled into a nearby rubber plantation.

Thus, after 1830, the action began to gravitate south toward An Loc. An attempt to pick up the survivors from the north compound by helicopter failed when ground to air fire precluded the rescue. With aerial escape unlikely, the men joined the dozens of other ARVN and American personnel scattered between Loc Ninh and An Loc streaming on foot toward An Loc. Close behind them came VC/NVA troops and tanks looking for and attacking isolated bands of ARVN troops.
During this very fluid action, the evading forces depended almost entirely on TACAIR for their protection. These aircraft roamed over the area and struck targets pointed out by FACs and radioed in by some of the elements on the ground. An American infantry adviser to the 18th Division, Captain Marvin C. Zumwalt, USA, estimated that only 790 of 1000 troops in the area reached An Loc, but those who did so made it because of TACAIR. And Captain Zumwalt had good reason to know. While talking to a FAC directing gunship support, he was wounded in the face by an exploding mortar round and sustained a broken jaw. The wounds restricted his breathing, and he was ordered to remain hidden with about 15 ARVN wounded to await medevac. The main body of troops then pushed on toward An Loc leaving the men with four weapons and limited ammunition.

The air support provided this group serves as an example of why the ground forces held their Army and Air Force counterparts in such high professional regards. Spectres came on station and flew continuous cover, putting down rings of fire 350-400 meters from the wounded men. When one gunship had to leave station, another moved in providing continuous cover. Finally at about 1100 on 8 April, the "Dust-off" medevac helicopters were able to rescue them. After intensive USAF preparation of the surrounding area, the three light helicopters flew through heavy fire and landed on the road next to the ditch. Upon takeoff the primary pickup ship took a hit on the main rotor, fuel cells, and tail boom, but still was able to fly to Lai Khe and safety. The trip was a harrowing one, flying at tree-top level to minimize ground fire and possible further injury to the ARVN
hanging on to the skids of the aircraft. At least one AK 47 round pierced the helicopter, further wounding an American NCO. The pilot has already been awarded the Silver Star and has been nominated for the Medal of Honor for braving such fire. In an aircraft designed to lift a maximum of four men, he carried out 12.

The air role at Loc Ninh made the battle a costly one for the VC/NVA even though air power could neither win the battle nor operate smoothly. Desperate situations call for desperate measures, and this included sending massive TACAIR over the district capital as quickly as possible. Possible problem areas noted by Spectres in the first day's action over Loc Ninh intensified because of increased air traffic. One Spectre crew noted that the target area was just "too congested to work." While Spectre would continually have to wait for higher priority aircraft to expend, to step aside because of ground requirements, or to abide by FAC decisions on what ordnance could best serve the ground forces, some congestion might be mitigated by improvement in command and control. The complaint voiced by another pilot that "there appears to be no coordination between GI and VNAF FACs," was directly related to the same problem. Streamlining command and control procedures would likely serve to enhance the use of weapons available as well as to reduce the possibility of inadvertent air losses because of collision or flying into "friendly" ordnance.

The complaint voiced by a Spectre crew on the first day of the battle concerning a FAC not understanding Spectre turned out to be a genuine
problem rather than an isolated incident. On 7 April, the commander of a Spectre asserted that none of the FACs over Loc Ninh that day understood the capability of the Spectre PAVE AEGIS system "to deliver ordnance accurately." At General Slay's request, the Spectre pilot briefed the FACs in general terms over Loc Ninh. Before the week was over, the 21st TASS Sundog FACs were formally briefed by AC-130 Spectre crews on Spectre and the PAVE AEGIS. Informal and candid "give and take" after the formal briefing gave the two groups of dedicated professionals a chance to listen to each other's problems. Later AC-130 mission reports and FAC interviews reflect increased understanding and mutual respect for each other's abilities.

The fall of Loc Ninh suggested that An Loc was the next target, and allied officials were highly concerned. Following this defeat, General Hollingsworth warned all elements in MR III that the VC/NVA would be certain to continue south on QL 13. Thus, effective at 1900 on 7 April, he placed all U.S. elements on yellow alert and warned each to "improve defensive positions to withstand heavy attacks by fire and possible direct fire from 75mm tank guns." Further, he directed that commanders "buck up the U.S. reporting" because "solid information" would be essential for sound decisions. In addition, Hollingsworth recommended that General Minh reinforce An Loc with more troops. While U.S. TACAIR would "continue to slow the advance" of hostile forces on An Loc, he felt that there had to be "maneuver battalions on the ground."
The ARVN command quickly reorganized ground forces around An Loc as General Hung was under "intense pressure" with the fall of Loc Ninh and the loss of the 9th Regiment there. The forces deployed around the city included the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 8th Regiment on the north and northwest, the 3d Ranger Group on the northeast corner and most of the east side, the 7th Regiment on the west and south of QL 13, and Sector Forces occupying the south and southeast. The second line of defense, or security line, was to include the Regional Forces camp 600 meters west of the southwest corner where the Province Chief had his headquarters. The 1st Battalions of the 52d and 48th Regiments were to be the third line of defense, or reserve, stationed around the artillery in the center of town.

On 7 April, a meeting of the National Security Council in Saigon tried to decide what areas were most crucial and needed reinforcements. General Nguyen Van Minh, the III Corps Commander, stated that the equivalent of four enemy divisions—the VC 5th and VC 9th Divisions, the NVA 7th Division, and three independent regiments—were operating in his area. Minh argued that the attacks in both MR I and MR II "were diversionary and that Saigon was the real target." President Thieu decided to support General Minh and gave him both the 21st ARVN Division, until that moment the major government force in the Delta, and the elite 1st Airborne Brigade, the highly touted palace guard.
During the next few days, enemy activity in MR III underscored General Minh's anticipation of sustained action there. On 8 April, the VC/NVA assaulted the radio relay station on Nui Ba Den (Black Virgin Mountain) in Tay Ninh Province. The following day, the station, used as the principal radio relay for Sundog FACs operating in MR III, fell. The airborne brigade moving up QL 13 toward An Loc ran into heavy resistance indicating new concentrations of hostile forces south of An Loc. In addition, NVA AAA batteries around Loc Ninh were observed being moved toward An Loc and increasing numbers of tanks were spotted in the area including a T-54, the first such sighting in MR III.

The government forces met increased enemy activity with increased air power, concentrating on tanks, hostile forces, and moving supplies and equipment. To reduce the time required to make these strikes, the Binh Long Province Chief relinquished his authority to approve air strikes to the Commanding General of the 5th ARVN Division although coordination with the civilian government continued. To disrupt enemy organization, TACAIR struck targets such as the communications center of the 9th VC Division near Quon Loi. Due to the fluid situation in the An Loc area, the effectiveness of the TACAIR was difficult to quantify but, on 12 April, 200 enemy troops killed by airstrikes were discovered four kilometers southwest of An Loc.

Colonel William Miller, USA, Senior American Adviser in the area at the time, wrote of the impact of the fall of Loc Ninh and events following.
on An Loc. As he drove through the provincial capital, he said, "the message was written on all the faces of the civilian and the military. The civilians were arriving from surrounding areas, yet An Loc was still a ghost town." The people all stayed in bomb shelters or tried to flee further south. All knew the attack was coming. An ARVN officer who was captured by the VC and escaped after the fall of Loc Ninh said his captors told him they were going to take An Loc at "any" cost.

On 12 April, President Thieu visited Binh Long Province to survey the battlefield situation and to emphasize his role as commander in chief. He made a public statement that district capitals might be abandoned, but that provincial capitals were to be defended at all costs. Colonel Miller stated that for Thieu, An Loc was "a Bastogne, a place where a stand or die defense would decide the fate of the enemy offensive closest to the national capital." When the actual battle for An Loc began on the following day, U.S. Ambassador Bunker pointed out that the battle had to be considered of "major psychological importance" because of Thieu's public statements.

By the night of 12/13 April, "ringed by enemy regiments, battered by enemy artillery, roofed with anti-aircraft fire with defenders driven into the perimeter of the town itself," the VC/NVA considered An Loc ready for capture. Artillery was heavy all day on the twelfth and throughout most of the evening until it reached a "crescendo" after 0300. At 0530, the indirect fire touched off the ammunition dump and POL storage areas. At 0730, out of the northeast, two dozen tanks including PT-76s led a major ground attack against An Loc.
At 0800, as the noise of indirect fire diminished, the rumble of T-54 tanks was heard in the streets of An Loc. The tanks rode in "cockily" with turrets open and commanders in view. Led to believe that the VC already occupied the city, the crews were exercising great care so that they would not shoot troops in the streets. They thought their mission was a ceremonial one—to go to the Provincial Chief's residence and run up the North Vietnamese flag. The ARVN troops in the streets quickly disposed of this myth by immobilizing the lead tanks with M-72 Light Anti-Tank Weapons (LAWs). Cobra helicopter gunships also took a heavy toll of the tanks with FFAR rockets. Thus the first attack was blunted through a combination of enemy ignorance and aggressive action by allied forces.

A second ground attack from the northwest began at 1015. ARVN airborne troops moving from the south to relieve An Loc met battalion sized resistance about the same time, thereby stopping the relief column. By 1330 the invading forces, including tanks, controlled the airstrip on the northeast in addition to the northern half of An Loc itself. At this time, General Hollingsworth received an inquiry from the Senior U.S. Adviser to the ARVN 5th Division concerning withdrawal of all American advisers as had been past policy in such situations. Hollingsworth decided to keep key American advisers at An Loc and Army advisers later said that they thought this decision was a big one in the allied success in holding the capital.
Over the battlefield, continued tactical air strikes kept the VC/NVA from maintaining the momentum necessary to overrun the defenses. This was in spite of intense AAA fire from .51 caliber and suspected 23mm and 37mm weapons. Cobra gunships did a magnificent job supporting ground troops against tanks until high density AAA forced their withdrawal. A testimony to this was heard over a FAC's radio when he cancelled a TACAIR sortie on a tank with the comment "oops they got another one!" Time after time TACAIR stopped tanks, destroyed supply vehicles, and repelled invaders. Of the 369 verified enemy killed on the thirteenth, 200 were killed by air. Even the B-52s contributed to the tactical situation. For example, one combined attack from the northwest happened to be passing through an ARC LIGHT target box when the strike occurred. The attack dissolved as three or four tanks were destroyed and an estimated 100 attackers were killed. Major General Hollingsworth reported to General Abrams that "massive air support of all types tipped the scales in our favor."

While the ground command was again laudatory about the use of air power, the pilots felt that some confusion existed and that improvements should be made. The massive TACAIR over a small battleground area required special care in maintaining command and control. On 13 April, one Spectre pilot reported that

mass confusion reigned supreme most of the time we were in the area. We were finally told by Sundog 36 to hose down the area near Hon Quon Airfield. We did. It was interesting because a flight of VNAF A-1s kept flying through our shooting orbit.
The following day a new system of command and control, reducing confusion and increasing tactical efficiency, was instituted. To prevent situations like the Spectre pilot described above, VNAF FACs were assigned to a specific sector and they handled VNAF TACAIR within their area. Three FACs were assigned to the USAF operating areas over An Loc. One of these FACs, usually the most experienced, flew high above the action as a command and control or "King" FAC. The "King" kept apprised of the ground situation and received all TACAIR allocations from the III Direct Air Support Center (DASC). The other two FACs functioned as regular operating FACs except that they received TACAIR sorties from the "King" FAC rather than directly from III DASC. This system resulted in a more efficient and effective use of TACAIR because it was more responsive to situation changes.

At 0430 on the 15th, the VC/NVA again shelled government positions in An Loc with 155mm howitzer and 122mm rocket fire beginning a new drive on the capital. Initial armor and ground attacks shattered against the combined strength of TACAIR and determined ground defenses. A second attack at 1000 appeared more successful. Enemy troops reached the wire to the southeast, and heavy AAA including .51 caliber and 23mm as well as suspected 37mm and 57mm AAA made "flying most gamey" in the words of General Hollingsworth. Nevertheless TACAIR flew all day over An Loc. When 10 reserve tanks rolled against the defenses at 1400, TACAIR and ground units destroyed nine. The massive TACAIR effort continued throughout the night, and by morning the heavy enemy pressure in the general area appeared "to have been defused by heavy airstrikes."
Although the defenders did not realize it at the time, the determined enemy initial attack phase against the An Loc defenses was over by 16 April. A week later General Minh, MR III Commander, claimed that An Loc's "worst crisis" was on 13 and 15 April when enemy tanks entered the town. With those days behind, Minh informed Thieu that he was "winning" and that his winning was "essential" to the defense of Saigon. This confirmed the earlier opinions of Ambassador Bunker and others. Thus with the first major attack phase at an end, the siege of An Loc had begun.
CHAPTER II

THE SIEGE

The reduced enemy ground force activity in the area around An Loc after 16 April was not the end of the campaign for the provincial capital, but only the beginning of a new phase. A noncommissioned officer from the 271st Regiment of the VC 9th Division, captured by ARVN on 13 April, told his captors that COSVN planned a three-day attack on An Loc. If this attack failed, the plan called for the VC/NVA troops to withdraw and to "shell An Loc as heavily as possible." Later events were to bear out this revelation. The COSVN reprimanded the VC 9th Division Commander for his failure to take the city, and steadily increasing indirect fire announced the new battle phase to government forces and refugees huddled in the city.

On 17 April, Col Miller, in a report to General Hollingsworth, correctly assessed the new phase about to begin. He noted that the VC/NVA were reinforcing their bunkers and had firmly entrenched artillery pieces, mortars, and AAA in fortified positions all around An Loc. In spite of heavy personnel losses resulting from U.S. and VNAF air strikes, the enemy seemed determined to continue the campaign. Miller believed that the anti-government forces would "use strangulation and starvation tactics--then attack in force." The siege about to take place was conceived in the classical pattern of the history of warfare and failed simply because air power provided sufficient leverage to keep hostile forces at bay, supply the city, and eventually to break the siege itself by assisting ground forces to relieve the city.
Early government hopes for breaking the siege hinged on the success of the ARVN forces moving north on QL 13 toward An Loc. Originally the 21st ARVN Division was committed up the highway to reinforce the An Loc battlefront and to provide a blocking force to protect Saigon should the provincial capital fall. When the battle for An Loc degenerated into a siege, the 21st Division was to smash the hostile forces south of the capital and to send relief troops into the beleaguered city. The NVA 7th Division located south of An Loc proved to be tough and resilient enough, however, to stall the government relief column on the highway.

Even TACAIR, B-52 strikes, and artillery firepower termed "outstanding" by the TRAC commander, were unable to hasten the movement of the relief forces against the determined NVA troops. Elements of the ARVN 1st Airborne Brigade, with an artillery battalion consisting of six 105mm howitzers, were airlifted over the deadlocked forces to new positions located southeast of An Loc. These positions were quickly scuttled by hostile forces and the battery was completely destroyed.

The destruction of this battery was another facet of the COSVN siege tactics. In addition to keeping ground forces from being reinforced, the VC/NVA also systematically destroyed government artillery capability, reducing ARVN counterattack potential to almost nothing. In retrospect, early enemy attacks on firebases resulting in the destruction of many artillery pieces were probably part of the overall strategy. At Loc Ninh, the initial attacks seized the artillery fire base protecting the town and the ammunition storage area fell quickly.
On 16 April, an ammunition storage area at Lai Khe, south of An Loc on QL 13, was struck by indirect fire resulting in the destruction of 8000 rounds of ammunition for 105mm and 155mm howitzers as well as destruction and damage to artillery pieces there. The attack on An Loc itself captured or destroyed much of the ARVN ordnance the first day. The pieces remaining in ARVN hands were effective at first, but they received the heaviest part of enemy fire. This resulted in all but one of the defenders' 105mm howitzers being destroyed and the destruction of virtually all the ammunition for the other pieces. This left only 60mm and 80mm mortars to serve the ARVN during the siege.

While the ARVN artillery was quickly silenced by destruction or lack of resupply, the hostile force's use of indirect fire increased steadily causing havoc in the city. The steel and explosive hail fell into An Loc at a rate of nearly 1300 rounds per day during the first two weeks of April and then increased. The field reports of "sporadic fire" came to mean incoming rounds in the neighborhood of 1000 per day. To produce this fearsome barrage, the VC/NVA used a variety of weapons and ammunition including 155mm and 105mm howitzers, 122mm and 107mm rockets, and assorted other mortar and recoilless weapons. This weaponry came from various locations. Some was abandoned by fleeing ARVN forces, captured by the enemy, and hidden before TACAIR could destroy it. Others were hauled in from the north through Cambodia. TACAIR did attempt to spot and destroy these weapons before they were returned to use against friendly positions. On 17 April, a FAC spotted four trucks hauling four 155mm howitzers south toward An Loc. Weather
temporarily precluded TACAIR strikes, but a Spectre engaged the vehicles. Shortly thereafter TACAIR arrived and assisted Spectre in destroying the four trucks and artillery pieces. In spite of this and similar preventive actions, a large number of pieces arrived at An Loc undetected until their muzzles began to flash.

Surrounded by artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, and ground troops, general conditions in the city steadily deteriorated. In addition to the government military forces in An Loc, there were approximately 10,000 civilians, mostly refugees, who added to the already serious water, sewerage, food, and shelter problems. The VC/NVA fully realized that these civilians greatly complicated the problems of the defenders of An Loc, and they made every effort to guide additional refugees into the city and to keep all the civilians confined to the besieged area. Major Raymond Haney, a U.S. adviser to the ARVN 5th Infantry Division at An Loc, related that a French/Vietnamese priest and, later, Buddhist monks, attempted to evacuate civilian refugees to the south. On both occasions the VC/NVA shelled the refugees, driving them back into the city. Haney saw the aftermath of the shelling--fallen refugees "laying in the ditches like cordwood."

Under such conditions, morale of the defenders had to be strengthened if the enemy siege was to fail. This was to prove an enormous task. Shortages of food and water would have been a sufficient detriment to morale in themselves. Perhaps even more eroding on morale, however, were medical and sanitation problems. At first all the seriously wounded were kept in a

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hospital—military and civilians alike. On the night of 13 April, the hospital and its 300 patients became the target for hostile 105mm and 155mm shells, resulting in the total destruction of the hospital and most of the patients as well. With no hospital facility available and medicines in short supply, wounds sustained during shelling and battle did not receive adequate medical care at An Loc. Unable to be medevaced out because of the intense AAA, the ARVN troops watched their wounds redden, fester in the heat, and turn gangrenous. Commanders and buddies could only try to keep flies away from the wounds and hope that no more of them would get hurt. To sustain a serious head, chest, or stomach wound was almost always a death sentence. Innumerable cases of disease, including cholera, spread quickly among the defenders imprisoned in the bunkered shelters for hours at a time during intense shelling. Under such conditions, even the barest minimums of sanitation could not be achieved and accumulated filth hastened the spread of disease and misery. The untreated wounds, diseases, and indirect fire led to so many dead that it became necessary to resort to mass burials in shallow graves using lime dropped from aircraft.

Intensifying the problems, the shortages and the inconveniences, the pain and the apprehension, was the shelling, day after day, minute after minute. The accurate enemy guns destroyed almost everything of material value to the defending forces. Even when the ARVN gun crews attempted to confuse the hostile gunners by constantly shifting positions of government guns, the new positions were quickly spotted and shelled. Most enemy observation points were from positions outside the defense perimeter.
While they poured shiper fire into the defense positions, hostile troops on rooftops in the northern part of An Loc relayed information to VC/NVA. Within the defense perimeter six young women were discovered with radio transmitters concealed in their brassieres. Accused of relaying information to enemy gun crews, the women were tied up and left "in an impact area where NVA artillery subsequently killed them."\textsuperscript{69/}

The point of discussing the conditions on the ground in the besieged city is to show why the ground commanders so desperately sought aerial support for resupply and medical evacuation. Unless these two things could be achieved, An Loc was lost. Intelligence reports indicated that the VC/NVA were counting on the rapidly accumulating morale problems to force surrender of the city and to encourage ARVN desertion. At this time, Colonel Miller asserted that the enemy "enjoyed" the fact of no resupply and no helicopters landing. He asserted that "come hell or high water, both should be accomplished.\textsuperscript{70/}

From the first days of the battle, allied commanders realized the importance of aerial resupply, but the problem was considered to be more of a logistical management one rather than one in which supplies would have to be "fought through" to the defenders. The first days' experience did little to change this apparent view. From 7-19 April, the Vietnamese and American CH-47s and VNAF C-123s and HU-1B helicopters flew 93 sorties delivering 301 tons of supplies. Unless one of these supply missions aborted prior to drop, all consigned goods were received by the government.
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Drop Zone for Aerial Resupply 15-26 April and 4 May to 25 June 1972

FIGURE 5

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forces on the ground and none were lost. The slow moving aircraft, how­
ever, proved a prime target for enemy gunners. Three U.S. CH-47s sustained
minor damage from mortar fire in the landing zone and, when a VNAF CH-47
was destroyed by hostile fire on 12 April, helicopter supply ended. The
VNAF C-123s flew 39 low level paradrops between 11 and 18 April. On the
40th sortie, the C-123 was hit by ground fire and crashed three kilometers
southwest of An Loc. Because of the high risk environment, the government
forces halted all low level C-123 resupply attempts.

Already on 15 April, while the C-123s were still making a valiant
attempt to resupply An Loc, Hq MACV requested the USAF to initiate the first
of what was to become an extensive series of air drops to the besieged
ARVN forces. The first five missions were planned as low altitude container
delivery system (CDS) daylight drops using USAF C-130s. The loads contained
ammunition, rations, and medical supplies and were to be delivered to a
200X200 meter soccer field drop zone in the southern part of the city.
While these five drops were satisfactory in terms of delivery, all air­
craft suffered moderate to severe damage from ground fire. On 18 April,
the fifth C-130 was struck with AAA fire, and went down west of town.
This air loss terminated the daylight low level drops with C-130s.

Unwilling to risk C-130 aircraft and crews on low level missions
any longer, the Air Force decided to attempt resupply using the Ground
Radar Aerial Delivery System (GRADS). Flying at a relatively "safe"
alitude of 6000-9000 feet, the aircraft was vectored to a Computed
Aerial Release Point (CARP) by a ground radar station (MSQ-77). Upon arrival, the aircraft accomplished a high altitude drop with a low opening parachute (HALO), the chute fully deploying at a predetermined point (usually 500-800 feet) above the ground. In eight missions between 19-23 April, the GRADS failed due to parachute malfunctions of every type imaginable. Some bundles smashed into the ground, but most drifted outside the defensive perimeter to succor the enemy. Malfunctions were traceable directly to Vietnamese packers who did not have the technical background or experience necessary to handle the more sophisticated packing techniques required for HALO procedures. Reluctantly the Air Force returned the C-130s to the low level CDS technique on 23 April.

Until the siege of An Loc, the USAF had found the CDS to be not only workable but very efficient. The C-130s would fly 15-20 miles at 230-250 knots indicated air speed until they were within one to two miles of the drop zone. The aircraft then "popped up" to an altitude of about 700 feet released their loads, and then descended to entry level and departed the area at a high rate of speed. To be successful, this system required an element of surprise and a relatively permissive environment, neither of which existed at An Loc. The VC/NVA ground forces were able to predict the path of the incoming aircraft by plotting locations received from ground observers strung throughout the area around An Loc. Surrounding the provincial capital and located on all possible air approaches to the city, heavy small arms, .51 caliber machine gun, and AAA fire were easily directed at the C-130s. Enemy gunfire could be especially effective over
the drop zone where all the C-130s had to pass at speeds as slow as 130 knots. Even when FACs coordinated tactical suppression missions along the same track the C-130 was to follow, only reduction—not elimination—of AAA was effected. The result was entirely predictable: 100 percent of the aircraft employing CDS techniques received battle damage.24/

Initial CDS deliveries elicited a cautious optimism on the part of General Hollingsworth. He thought that the first drops had "a fair degree of accuracy," but wasn't sure of the recovery rate, especially during night drops. From his point of view, daylight low level drops were more "desirable" because the ground forces would have a better chance to spot and recover the supplies.25/ On the morning of 26 April, a C-130 on a CDS run was struck by ground fire, exploded, and crashed. Thus the 374th Tactical Airlift Wing abandoned the CDS daylight drops and scheduled all the remaining CDS deliveries at night.26/

While the night missions involved somewhat less risk for the aircrews, the effectiveness of resupply plummeted. On the night of 27/28 April, the ground commanders reported that one last VNAF C-123 high altitude mission resulted in only one of eight drops on target and only six bundles out of 116 recovered. Night CDS missions fared little better. On 1 May, General Hollingsworth asserted that during the period 15-30 April less than thirty percent of the USAF C-130 tonnage had been recovered by ARVN forces. VNAF supply drops had even less success.27/
The reasons for the low recovery rate were many and complex. Due to the constricted position of the defenders, the available drop zone was smaller than the one recommended in standard Air Force guidelines. Near misses often resulted in a total loss of supplies because the government forces did not have adequate control and security over the area surrounding the drop zone. Nightdrops magnified these problems considerably. Aircrews required a visual sighting of the drop zone to be effective and ordinarily had trained on drop zones with standard lighting—lights located on timing points, leading edge, trailing edge, and point of impact. Makeshift ground arrangements failing, crews dropped portable runway markers which the ARVN placed on the field. The northern end of the field was lighted with an "X" and desired impact point with a "T". Even with these lights in operation, the many lights and fires in An Loc confused the crews looking for a small zone while under intense fire.

Other aircraft in the inventory tried to give the C-130s the best possible chance to make successful CDS drops but they did not resolve the basic problems. Already mentioned was TACAIR suppression of ground fire preparatory to the low level run. The second attempt was an innovation first used at An Loc. FACs had earlier discovered here that when the infrared covers were removed from the .2-KW light on the AC-130s, the white light could be used to mark strike targets when all flares were expended. This same basic system was used to help the supply planes find the drop zone. The AC-130 located the zone through various methods and then on request illuminated the drop zone immediately prior to drop to give the
Drop Zone for Aerial Resupply 27 April - 4 May 1972

FIGURE 6

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C-130 a reference point. AC-119 Stingers were also used in the illuminating role. Showing the lights for as little as five seconds vastly improved drop chances for the gunships to be struck by ground fire and missiles because the light attracted ordnance both literally and figuratively. Thus this method was discontinued at An Loc.

For the reasons cited above, CDS deliveries were as much as one kilometer off target on many occasions, but even many deliveries on or near target were not recovered either. During the night drops, ground parties and FACs had difficulty in observing the bundle either descending or after landing. In an attempt to correct this problem, small high intensity "Flashers" were attached to each bundle but proved unsatisfactory when the flashing lights appeared as small arms fire and blended in with the battle landscape. Later small flashlights, sealed in plastic, were attached to the bundles, but they could not be seen due to low intensity. Thus many bundles were found as quickly by the hostile forces as by the defenders. Where bundles were easily observed, enemy artillery zeroed in on them causing havoc among recovery groups.

The unsatisfactory aerial resupply program tended to make fear of shortages a self-fulfilling prophecy. Occasionally (and no one knows how often), when supplies were found by ARVN, they did not report recovery, but hoarded what they found. This condition was more than routine stockpiling but was caused by undisciplined men acting in desperation because of hunger and disease. Fights often occurred between ARVN troops over supplies and there are documented cases of armed troops refusing to turn over bundles to
centrally constituted supply authorities. Outside the defense perimeter the VC/NVA needed supplies for survival also. Thus furious fire fights occurred over stray bundles falling between the opposing forces. This is not to suggest that aerial resupply was a success, and the failure was distribution on the ground, because this was not the case. Rather, the ineffective aerial supply led frightened units and individuals to believe relief would never come, and personal survival became a dominant thought in a confused situation with discipline deteriorating all the time. This ground distribution situation was resolved only after the aerial resupply problem was solved and discipline was reinstituted. 82/

Frustration was everywhere—in the air and on the ground—over the seemingly hopeless task of supplying the city. As the days went by, direct fire grew heavier and was increasingly more accurate. This heavy fire contributed greatly to the poor drop and recovery results, and ground commanders were concerned that drops were becoming more harmful than helpful to their cause. The classic example was that of a VC officer captured on the east side of town by ARVN defenders. While being interrogated, the officer requested a can of fruit cocktail because he said he had become accustomed to eating it since some American drops had been recovered by his unit. A U.S. officer who witnessed the scene, and who was subsisting on brackish water, canned fish, and rice, found the request extremely depressing. 83/

The low point for the aerial resupply mission was reached on 3 May. The previous night seven drops had been scheduled into An Loc. When the
first fell 700 meters from the drop zone, the remaining drops were can-
celled. Just before midnight on 3 May, a C-130 on a CDS run was apparently
hit and crashed. On the following day, Colonel Miller told General
Hollingsworth that it would be better to cancel aerial resupply until a
better system could be developed. Thus, on 4 May, all planned low level
CDS drops were cancelled and a renewed effort began on high altitude drops.
Throughout the entire siege, but especially through 4 May, the C-130 crews
served with great professionalism and bravery. In spite of heavy defenses
and an inadequate delivery system, the crews managed to fight some supplies
through to An Loc, helping keep the defenders in place. General Vogt,
among others, highly praised their heroism. Improved techniques such as
GRADS would capitalize on the C-130 crews' dedication to duty.

On paper, the GRADS program using the HALO drop seemed to be a work-
able procedure if technical problems cropping up on the combat tests could
be solved. In response to Hq MACV's request for assistance, Army and Air
Force paradrop experts flew to Vietnam. Quality control personnel from
CCK, Taiwan began trouble shooting procedures to isolate the reasons for
the malfunctions. The Army sent 76 packers from the 549th Quartermasters
Aerial Resupply Company in Okinawa. The advisory people corrected some
major problems on the spot and instigated new procedures. This, combined
with the use of experienced Army riggers and packers, immediately improved
the quality of aerial resupply. When sufficient equipment was not avail-
able for all HALO drops, a high velocity system was instituted, and it proved
to be the most accurate of all drop systems used at An Loc. This method also
resulted in a limited dispersion of its 16 bundles, usually in an area 100 x 150 meters, allowing easier recovery. The major disadvantage was the relatively rapid rate of descent (approximately 128 feet per second) which caused damage to goods on impact. Experiments and test drops revealed what could be successfully dropped. For example, rice in boxes, fuel in barrels 2/3 to 3/4 full, and M-16 ammunition landed intact. However, fuel drums flattened, bags of rice split and, when a chute holding 105mm ammunition malfunctioned, primary and sympathetic detonations lasted for hours. 

The immediate improvement in aerial resupply was noted on the battlefield by the ground commanders. On 5 May, General Hollingsworth wrote that three HALO drops containing 24 bundles were attempted. Although only 50 percent of the chutes opened properly, at least only one bundle was recovered by hostile forces. 87/ His comment on the next day's drops that "most of the supplies did land inside the perimeter" indicated that ground commanders were concerned not only that they were supplied, but also that the enemy was not. The next days continued to show improvement in parachute effectiveness and supplies recoverable. By 8 May, General Hollingsworth discussed air drop in the tone of a commander expecting and receiving aerial support: 88 tons dropped, 68 tons recovered, 19 tons lost to malfunctions, one ton outside the zone. The problem of aerial resupply, if not completely solved, was acceptable and improving so that the TRAC Commander could turn his attention to other demands. 

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The heavy AAA that restricted aerial resupply also substantially precluded medical evacuation. The quickest and most effective method previously used had been with specially equipped helicopters manned by MEDEVAC trained crews. The heavy, intense AAA and accurate artillery, however, created an environment in which VNAF crews either were "reluctant to land helicopters in order to pick up wounded or seemingly deliberately landing on LZs where no wounded were waiting." As discussed before, the presence of seriously injured over long periods of time was most detrimental to morale. That some helicopters were able to land only served to intensify the problem. For example, the U.S. helicopters generally were able to remove a wounded American in a reasonable length of time; the VNAF were not. On occasions when a VNAF helicopter did land, the walking wounded and even healthy ARVN climbed aboard the helicopter or clung to the skids in a desperate attempt to leave, causing one such helicopter to crash because of overloading. One American officer who helped carry a litter patient out to the loading zone said that he couldn't explain his "disappointment" when the helicopter left with men in far better condition than the man he was carrying.

On 3 May, as a result of a personal request by General Minh, General Hollingsworth agreed to provide, on a one-time basis, a U.S. mission commander and a single U.S. lead ship for a combined medevac operation at An Loc. He hoped to demonstrate to the VNAF that successful medevac was possible at a reasonable risk if proper leadership, planning and execution existed. Colonel John Richardson planned the mission and led four VNAF
helicopters in at treetop level. The mission succeeded, bringing in 36 fresh troops and taking out 42 wounded with only insignificant small arms fire encountered. General Hollingsworth hoped that the demonstration had motivated the VNAF toward better performance because he believed that much of III Corps' difficulties stemmed from the VNAF's unresponsiveness prior to the demonstration. For a few days, his hopes were rewarded as the VNAF took three or four ships a day in and out of An Loc.

The VC/NVA observers around An Loc could easily see the rapidly increasing effectiveness of aerial resupply and the tentative but positive attempts to medevac in spite of the heaviest ground fire they were able to muster. Between 4 and 9 May, GRADS missions resulted in the dropping of 492 bundles with a 94 percent recovery rate. With that rate of accuracy, the limiting factor on supplies became the number of missions flown, and not the tenacity of the VC/NVA air defense. These deliveries helped more than the physical situation. Major Ingram asserted that the successful drops "had almost an undefinable impact in raising their [the ARVN defenders'] morale, giving them hope and raising them from a total situation of frustration to one of confidence."

Outside the city, the VC/NVA were being pushed into a new battle situation. The literally thousands of air sorties flown against their positions had disrupted their supplies, decimated their troops, and made it difficult if not impossible to stem a general decline in their combat capability. Now that the An Loc defenders appeared to be in a position to start getting
stronger because of the recent improvements in aerial resupply, only one hope for success at An Loc remained—a smashing attack to overcome the city before it could become too strong through reinforcement and resupply.
CHAPTER III
BREAKING THE SIEGE

The situation at An Loc during the first days of May was somewhat confusing. Prisoner interrogations and other intelligence sources indicated that the VC/NVA were disengaging and moving to other areas. On the other hand, the 21st ARVN Division was making little or no progress up QL 13 in spite of air support including B-52 strikes, and indirect fire into defense positions continued to average well over 1000 rounds per day. On 6 May, a prisoner from the VC 9th Division informed his captors that his commander had been reprimanded for failing to take An Loc and that the commander of the VC 5th Division had boasted that he could take An Loc in three days. Although no specific date was mentioned, the implication was soon. Further reports suggested that the 174th and 275th Regiments of the VC 5th Division would attack from the east supported by the 271st and 272d Regiments of the VC 9th Division.

The boast of the 5th Division Commander to take An Loc reflected the COSVN determination to succeed at An Loc and also the general level of enthusiasm and desire COSVN tried to sustain among all invading troops. One prized award given to individual Viet Cong troops was the "Determined To Win Warrior." The finding of enemy dead chained to their weapons was another facet of this general tone. Men chained inside their tanks to their positions were reported by both Howard Truckner of ABC and columnist Joseph Alsop. Even General Hollingsworth personally observed the remains of one
NVA soldier "whose hands were tied to his .51 caliber machine gun."

The western world understandably reacted in horror to these stories. One possible explanation was offered by two POWs from a tank unit. One indicated that the tank chaining "was done ceremonially and individuals had been prompted to volunteer for the chaining ceremony as a mark of distinction," and many did. Further, many tankers "had their arms tattooed with slogans such as "Drive Fiercely" and "Attack Deeply." Whether the individual VC were as determined as the POW inferred or whether the VC officers found it necessary to chain men to make them fight, the end result was the same for the defenders--the VC were not going to leave An Loc without further struggle.

The defenders at An Loc were equally determined to triumph, but felt their position was being undermined by the thousands of shells exploding in their area daily. With no counter-artillery support available, the ground commanders sought maximum air support to suppress the fire. When General Hollingsworth heard that Spectre gunships were to be taken away from An Loc because the AAA risk had become too great, he protested the action in a message to General Abrams. The loss of Spectre, he feared, would multiply the already fearsome barrages. He asserted that Spectre "was invaluable in its ability to pick up, lock onto, and destroy enemy mortar positions which are employing 'hugging' tactics too close to friendly units to be vulnerable to TACAIR and 8-52 fire." He said that Spectre was "an ideal weapon" not only to locate but also to destroy such positions. Further, Hollingsworth said that Spectre was "the best system
I know of to detect and destroy the trucks that are used nightly hauling ammo resupply to the enemy positions." Just a day later, Spectre would be doing yeoman duty in helping repel another major attack on An Loc.

At 0030 on 11 May heavy artillery fire directed against An Loc removed all doubt about VC/NVA intentions. Major Ingram said that the barrage was so heavy that to leave your bunker was "certain death." Captain Moffett said that the noise kept going up to a crescendo ... it sounded like somebody was popping popcorn—shaking it just all over the city ... and about 4 or 4:30 it stopped—bam—just like somebody dropped down a baton. Everything stopped at once.

The contrast between rounds every five seconds climaxing an over 7000 round barrage and the relative quiet that followed brought great apprehension. But inexplicably the enemy paused before attacking while VNAF and USAF TACAIR streaked toward the city. At 0500 a combined tank and infantry attack struck with fury at defense perimeters and quickly established salient in the ARVN defenses in both the northeast and western sections of town. Colonel Ulmer, who replaced Colonel Miller as Senior Adviser to the ARVN 5th Division, wrote that the VC/NVA strategy was to continue to drive into these two salients. With this tactic, the enemy hoped to link up and thus split the ARVN defenders into two enclaves. The ARVN commander's response to this tactic was to rapidly shift his 5th Airborne Battalion between the two salients, preventing their link and holding them in place until air power could help eliminate the salients. In addition

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to these two major thrusts, tanks and heavy troop contacts were reported all over the perimeter.

The forceful attack by the VC/NVA was met by a spirited and effective defense. ARVN troops who learned the effectiveness of M-72 LAWs against tanks in the April attacks not only stood their ground but sought out tanks to engage. By noon these ground troops had destroyed seven tanks, principally with their LAWs. Cobra gunships equipped with 2.75 inch FEAR rockets engaged other tanks, destroying or immobilizing four more. When the first waves of hostile forces moved forward, FACs directed whatever ordnance was available to them to slow the attacks. For example, when a reported battalion of enemy troops or approximately 500 men threatened to overrun the 36th Ranger Battalion, the FAC ordered "Daisy Cutters" dropped 200 meters in front of the ranger positions. The resulting blasts halted the attack and turned back the hostile troops. The TACAIR pilots responding showed great bravery and professionalism as well. In the midst of the battle, TACAIR received a distress call from General Hung's command bunker, under point blank range fire from a NVA tank. Lt Colonel Gordo Weed answered the call with his A-37 equipped with two 250 lb. bombs. On the first pass the first bomb scored a direct hit on the tank, but--the bomb was a dud! The tank stopped firing at the bunker, but it was not immobilized. Again braving a hail of 37mm and .51 caliber ground fire that had already downed one A-37, he released his second bomb as well. The resulting explosions destroyed the tank and routed its supporting infantry troops.