THE VIET-CONG
TET OFFENSIVE
1968
Series of Combat History

THE VIET CONG
« TET » OFFENSIVE
(1968)

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In memory of the many Freedom Fighters who have given their lives so that the South Vietnamese nation might live, and in memory of the many innocent people who found death at the hands of their V.C. "liberators".

Joint General Staff, RVNAF
COMMUNISTS everywhere share a common characteristic. They are experts in the use of a terminology based on two words: "revolution" and "people". In doing so, they evidently seek to create the impression that only they are revolutionary and only they have the interests of the masses at heart.

In the Bolshevik revolution in Russia over half a century ago as well as in the protracted Vietnam conflict, the Communists have also maintained that their revolution was aimed at the overthrow of a totalitarian regime full of injustices. And they have always boasted to be the only ones to seek the establishment of a new society based on freedom, peace and the free pursuit of happiness.

Let us temporarily set aside the question whether the Communists really have the interests of the masses at heart and let us see whether they are justified in their claim to be the only true servants of the people.

For many centuries, years and years before Communism was invented, there have been many who think that the best political base is the people. Confucius, Mencius, Jesus Christ and the Buddha, all these thinkers and many others have agreed in their writings and preachings that service to the people is the best basis for any political doctrine.

It ensues therefrom that the principle behind the Communists' "people's revolution" is nothing new, indeed. On the contrary, such Communist deeds as were recorded at Quynh-Luu, Budapest and Poznan, and more recently such developments as the Chinese aggression in Tibet and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, clearly prove that the Communists really do not care about the interests of the masses and may betray revolutionary principles in the most blatant manner.

More particularly in the northern part of our country, although the Communist regime has been boasting for the past twenty years the success of their revolution, the people's life is still a long
string of unhappy days. Instead of the notions of independence, liberty and happiness they were promised in the constitution, North Vietnam has grown more and more dependent on Russia and China. The North Vietnamese people have been forced to work as slaves, and the 20,000,000 sons and daughters of the Dragon have gone from one predicament to another.

Not content with only imposing their will on those of the North, the Hanoi authorities have tried to impose their inhuman regime on the remaining free Vietnamese living below the seventeenth parallel. And, loyal to their notion of people's war, they have consistently sought the implementation of the set of strategy and tactics that have proven effective in other such conflicts.

From the sabotage of bridges and roads to make their presence felt to the reduction of the people to a state of total passiveness through discriminate or indiscriminate terror, the Communists have not refrained from anything, including most savage deeds, to foster their objectives.

Within the framework of this "Introduction", we cannot, of course, give a detailed analysis of the strategy and tactics of the enemy and their inhuman character. It is simply our intention to ask you to read this book on their "General Offensive" (1968) fully so as to get an idea of their real intentions. We are sure you will agree with us whether the Communists really seek a revolution in the interests of the people or not.

In obvious contempt for the sacredness of the New Year holidays, evident disregard of their own promises to cease fire for seven days, and in complete scorn for the welfare of the citizen, the Communists suddenly launched an unprecedented large-scale offensive that sowed death and destruction on a scale that even the Vietnamese have not known after 20 years of war.

But these can be said to be nothing as compared to what they asked the people to do during these attacks. In Saigon, in Hue, and in many other provincial cities, the Communists resorted to the most incredible barbarous methods to force the people to "rise up". And they also proved incomparable in killing off the seeds of opposition: the people of Saigon were witness to the murder of hundreds of families and the people of Hue made to see the burial of thousands of persons still alive.
Their "people's revolution" tactics thus failed. Wherever the Communists came, the people simply left the place. But let us not give you any more details since you may charge us with propaganda making. We simply invite you to screen the many pictures that adorn the following pages of this historic document. For we are sure these pictures are more convincing than hundreds of editorials and these impartial reports are more factual than hundreds of the most well-prepared indictments.

After you have finished reading this book, we simply would like to ask you to stop and think for a while and see whether the Communists are really revolutionary and genuinely have the interest of the people at heart.

APO, 4002, 1 July 1969

General CAC VAN VIEN
Chief, Joint General Staff
RVN Armed Forces
Saigon, Republic of Vietnam
Authors of strategic tenets, past and present, have displayed one noted similarity: advocacy of any strategem to accomplish the objectives. In actual warfare it is only natural that a party to a conflict should take full advantage of the opponent's weaknesses to better its own chance of success.

Sun-tse, the great Chinese strategist, has dwelt extensively on this point in a book entitled "Military Struggle". A Chinese military author of the name of Ly Te Xuyen, who lived many centuries after Sun, also was to propose something closely related to the Chinese master's teaching. In his book entitled "VIET DIEN U LINH TAP", Xuyen claimed that,"It is much better to attack the enemy than to wait for his attack".

Against this background of military advice, should we forgive North Vietnam and the Communist Liberation Front (NLF) for seeking our destruction in the holiday period that marked the beginning of the Year of the Monkey (1968)? This action was in obvious contempt of the safety and well-being of the common people.

No, we certainly should not.

The enemy should not get all the blame, however. Each and every one of us should claim some of it too. We committed the mistake of considering our foes as civilized human beings whose suggestion for a week-long holiday truce reflected to some extent a respect for traditions and the well-being of the citizen. In the pre-Tet days of last year we also made the tragic error of underestimating the machiavellism of our foes and failed to devise proper measures to prevent their plot.

For those who still nurtured doubts about the wickedness of the enemy or still might toy with the idea that the Communists "are patriots in their own way", the Tet offensive was the best opportunity to see the Viet Cong insurgents and their North Vietnamese accomplices in their true light. Not only did the Communists show absolute contempt for the people's welfare in starting an unprecedented offensive at the height of the nation's most sacred holiday but their conduct throughout the land eloquently disproved their claims.
to be the true defenders of human brotherhood and lovers of the fatherland.

The Communist effort was to serve no real purpose. Although Hanoi's plan of action was remarkable and the strategy and tactics employed by Communist troops equally unique - these were to put them temporarily at an advantage in Saigon and many other big cities - the situation was reversed within a few hours and it soon was evident that the Winter-Spring Campaign was a catastrophe of major proportions for the attackers.

One of the reasons Hanoi failed to achieve their aims was the immensely effective reaction of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces. The South Vietnamese soldier fought bravely and effectively in obvious contrast to the enemy criticisms that had often been leveled against him. On the contrary, Viet Cong soldiers did not show themselves in their best light and were denied support from the very people they had always claimed to be trying to liberate.

What the Viet Cong radio described as "glorious achievements" during the two waves of attack in the early months of 1968 amounted to total of 60,000 Communists killed, another 10,000 taken prisoner and over 17,000 of their weapons captured by government troops. Allied losses, although heavy, did not approach one tenth of those suffered by the insurgents.

These "achievements" took the form of untold sufferings for the common people: 14,000 civilians killed, including persons of all ages and social strata, 50,000 houses destroyed and the reduction of 700,000 persons to a state of dire poverty.

From a moral viewpoint, however, these were petty things as compared to what the Communists did militarily during the campaign. With most of their experienced fighters no longer available for the attacks, they resorted to dispatching teenage boys to find certain death in battle. They also pounded population centers with absolutely no strategic or tactical value with hundreds of rockets for the primary purpose of punishing innocent people for their non-cooperation.

"The Communist Tet offensive 1968" has been written not so much to bare Viet Cong crimes, vis-a-vis humanity, rather it has been prepared with the hopes of awakening those, among the two billion people of the world, who still nurture illusions about Com-
munism and Communists. It also has been compiled at great speed in order to demonstrate to the world the incomparable determination of the Vietnamese people to remain free in the face of untold hardships and sufferings inflicted by the hands of their "liberators".

The reader is completely free to assess the material herein presented. In our humble view, it is eloquent enough and needs no further elaboration.

LTC PHAM VAN SON
Chief, Military History Division
J-5, Joint General Staff
RVN Armed Forces
Saigon, Republic of Vietnam
The following pages have been written to record the many developments that constitute the Communist 'General Offensive' of 1968. They have been compiled with the simple intention to collect in book form the many lessons of history that are of concern to each and every one of the members of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

In compiling this book, which we should like to be as accurate as possible, we have dispatched a group of military historians to many areas of the Republic to collect information and interview many of the central characters of the dramas that unfolded there. We have to say, however, that the Viet Cong 'Tet' offensive was of such a magnitude as to make a complete gathering of facts an impossible undertaking.

Moreover, with time passing so very rapidly relegating quite a few details into oblivion and with the reconstruction work progressing most unsatisfactorily and healing the wounds of war, our task was not an easy one. We have, thus, to rely on some of the press reports that were published at the time of the 'Tet' fighting and make them parts of this book with the hope that their authors will not object to our doing so without seeking their permission. In view of the common good, we dare hope that they accept herein our most heartfelt gratitude.

Also, in our effort to publish this book, we have received invaluable help of many military commands that came in the form of pictures and documents directly related to the many developments of this nation's history in the first half of the year 1968. We should like to acknowledge hereby our sincerest thanks for their immense assistance without which this book could not have been written.

Moreover, let us say that this book perforce will bear quite a few shortcomings which we would like to eliminate with the help of our readers. If you are in possession of documents and information, we would like to invite you to share these with us. For a better second edition of this book, you are kindly invited to write us at the following address: History Section, J5/JGS/RVNAF, APO, 4002.

History Section
J5/Joint General Staff
RVN Armed Forces
Saigon, Republic of Vietnam
CHAPTER I

GENERAL NATURE OF
THE V.C.
WINTER-SPRING CAMPAIGN (1968)
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF SOUTH VIET NAM

CITIES ATTACKED BY VIET CONG DURING TET (1968)
General Nature of Hanoi's Winter-Spring Campaign

What was to be referred to as the Communist Winter-Campaign (WSC) or "general attacks, general uprisings" or Tet Offensive was launched in the early days of the Year of the Monkey (January - February 1968). These operations took the form of incessant and powerful attacks against practically all the cities and townships of South Vietnam.

Ten days before the campaign started the Communist High Command had ordered an unprecedental mortar and rocket attack against the Allied strategic base at Khe Sanh which was followed up with violent ground assaults on the besieged outpost. The action, which took place on 20 January 1968, probably was intended to divert the attention of the Vietnamese and U.S. High Commands away from what the Communists really had in mind.

A small locality near the Laotian and North Vietnamese borders and not very far from Con Tien where big battles had been recorded in mid-1967, Khe Sanh practically sits on the main infiltration routes that lead to the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam. The base itself is positioned in the middle of a square mile valley surrounded by high mountains. It was manned by about 6,000 U.S. Marines and a small contingent of South Vietnamese Rangers.

Khe Sanh was served by a small airport and could rely on three small outposts atop Hills 881, 861 and 1015 for advance warning of a major Communist thrust. To the east was Camp Carroll, to the west Lang Vei, a small village, the defense of which was entrusted to a battalion of Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and a handful of American advisors.

The North Vietnamese attack on Khe Sanh resulted in 20 Leathernecks being killed and 109 wounded in the very first minutes of the battle. These casualties were mainly due to the lengthy artillery barrage against Camp Carroll which was followed by ground assaults against the troops on Hills 881 and 861. In this probe, the 26th Regiment of the Third Marine Division had its first taste of the tactics of the 325th Division of the People's Army of (North) Vietnam (PAVN).

Face with the prospects of a big battle at Khe Sanh,
which might grow even bigger in view of the reported presence of another two PAVN divisions in that general area, the U.S. and Vietnamese High Commands reduced by twelve hours an original 48-hour Tet truce. Still, there would be no military activities on the part of the Allies from six PM January 29 to six AM January 31.

The Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) and MACV, however, took the precaution of ordering a series of measures for an effective defense of the two northernmost provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien. These included among other things the expansion of local garrisons to 50,000 men. Also an airborne task force was dispatched to Hue and elements of the U.S. 1st Airmobile Division were ordered North.

Prior to Tet only the Second and Ninth Airborne Battalions had arrived in the northern provinces. Only on the second day of the Year of the Monkey (Jan. 31), did the staff of the task force and the Seventh Battalion arrive in the former imperial capital. Meanwhile the U.S. Airmobile Division had arrived from An Khe but it took a position from which it could not easily reach Hue. Both Vietnamese and U.S. reinforcements had been intended simply for relieving the Sanh in the event of major raids and thus did not get involved in local military operations.

At that time it was the general consensus of military strategists and tacticians that the Viet Cong were only capable of conducting large scale operations for a short time from bases of operations located along the borders. Any attacks of this nature were doomed to failure. With forces disposed in this way it was certain that the enemy could gain nothing of importance as the situation in progress so indicated.

As to the in-country operation, it was estimated in staff planning that the enemy force stationed within the country were able to mount multibattalion-size attacks aimed at creating repercussions within the population. They were only capable of launching attacks for short periods of time. Large scale or long term attacks doomed them to destruction.

The balance of forces as well as the general situation in South Vietnam, after the seesaw battles at Con Tien and Dakto and the friendly victories at Loc Ninh and Phuoc Qua, seemed to indicate a favorable trend that would ultimately result in the victorious conclusion of the war for the friendly side.
To knowledgeable observers of the Vietnamese scene, however, the situation was not at all certain. The problems of pacification remained very much unsolved. Enemy-controlled areas included a large percentage of the Vietnamese countryside. The V.C. infrastructure in various areas either remained intact or recorded an expansion that sometimes brought the enemy right to the fringes of big cities and townships.

In the final months of 1967 the situation was best reflected in the number of political assassinations and terrorist activities which were mainly aimed at government of Vietnam (GVN) administrative cadres at the village and hamlet levels. Taking advantage of the situation created by these incidents the enemy silently infiltrated arms and men into the most secure GVN areas.

Outwardly, however, the situation remained calm, thereby facilitating enemy troop movements throughout the land. At the approach of Tet, with the exception of Khe Sanh, a relative lull seemed to be prevailing all over South Vietnam. In the context of this situation leaves were readily granted the troops for the lunar New Year and measures were taken by the Administration to give the common people as normal a Tet as possible.

Premier Nguyen Van Loc, for example, signed an order authorizing the people to enjoy the practice of using firecracker in the four-day period ending February 2, as may be deemed fit by the local authorities. The sound of firecrackers could be heard in Saigon-Cholon over ten days before the New Year actually began. The people had forgotten about the dying war. They wanted to celebrate Tet with as much fervor as in the old days.

**Perspectives**

Looking back a couple of years one may have a better assessment of the Tet events. The War Cabinet of Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky was formed in mid-1965 amidst considerable popular expectations. The Vice Marshal and his colleagues were mostly young men whose personalities captured the imagination of the people.

Even in the early days of the Ky administration, revolutionary ideals and reforms no longer were viewed as distant, unreachable ideas. The Premier and his cabinet ministers insisted on being called Chairman of the Central Executive Committee and Commissioners General. The people were pleased to see cabinet members wear grey
khaki uniforms with only one badge proclaiming their loyalty to the "Fatherland and People".

Titles and dresses naturally are no reflection of performance. The average person knew it but he also got the impression that there was something new in the political and administrative apparatus. The change could only be for the better for it marked a visible divorce from the feudal past.

The National Leadership Committee or Directory and the government called for austerity in the midst of a protracted war. "New Society Day" was proclaimed on the occasion of the presentation of the war cabinet at Independence Palace. Hundreds of representatives from all popular strata were present.

These encouraging signs, however, were to prove little.

The war cabinet and the personality of its leader, Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, originated and tried to accomplish big and continuing programs. For reasons unknown the administrative machinery failed to produce the results the average person had hoped it would.

Ky remained in office until South Vietnam completed the nation of such basic democratic institutions as a Constitution, a general Parliament, and a popularly elected President. These were tasks for someone confronted with the many difficulties Ky had to face in the 1965-66 period. The most important of these, of course, was the so-called Buddhist Crisis in Da Nang and Hue which brought about his downfall and the end of South Vietnam as a member of the community of nations.

In addition to the Buddhist crisis there were many other internal difficulties which were reflected in the then-current press. There was so much infighting among the many pressure groups within the administration that no public figure stood out. No leader could gain the support of the majority of the people.

As the Year of the Monkey approached, South Vietnamese society remained pretty much the same with a fun-loving tradition altered by the war. This was all the more visible in the towns where little was known of the long conflict.

Indeed, for the city-dwellers, the war seemed to be as remote as the moon. They were sometimes reminded of its reality.
VC troops start the greatest offensive campaign of the VN War amid firecracker explosions greeting the New Year.
FROM PEACE
by the sight of long ammunition convoys and the sound of gunfire and bomb explosions. On the whole the terrible war had no dramatic impact on them beyond the effects of an inflationary spiral that only hit wage earners. The greater availability of money created a semblance of affluence unparalleled in the modern history of South Vietnam.

Tet was to give this apparently affluent society a golden opportunity to spend their money surplus. Two weeks before the traditional celebration time, hundreds of parties were given each night in Saigon without regard for their high costs.

The celebrations were not just limited to the rich and very rich. Employees of U.S. agencies and the great majority of the working classes who had been enjoying incomparable pay conditions, thanks to the shortage of labor, also had plenty of money to buy whatever they pleased. Prostitutes and their great purchasing power also contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of unparalleled prosperity...

Even servicemen and civil servants, the poorest of them all in the new social structure, did their best to join in the buying spree unwilling to give their loved ones the impression that they had gone down the last step of the social scale. There were many cases of wage-earners pawning their most precious possessions in order to give their children a decent Tet.

Among the politically-conscious Vietnamese, many thought the critical situation of the land demanded a total divorce with past traditions and the initiation of new ways of life more compatible with the sacrifices and suffering of the majority. But their views were unheeded.

The face of society was one of rapid deterioration with traditional moral values swept aside while new ones had yet to be adopted. Homo homini lupus, each was only living for himself, trying his best to cope with the inflation while those with the opportunity to get rich fast continued to accumulate more wealth at the expense of the fighting men and the masses.

This crisis had its best reflection in the manner in which Tet was celebrated. When the Year of the Monkey arrived it was greeted with an unprecedented and uninterrupted explosion of firecrackers. Ten five-yard-long strings of firecrackers could be seen hanging at the gates of many mansions. To share in the amount of luck of the new year, even the poorest among the poor also joined in the fun.
Suddenly, Last Spring Time

All of a sudden the sounds of big and small guns were heard in the midst of the ghost-scaring firecracker explosions. The peace of South Vietnam's secured areas was shattered. A series of bold and confusing battlelines were drawn through back gardens. The Communists achieved this feat because of the careless abolishment of the curfew and they did it through violating their self-proclaimed holiday truce.

On New Year's eve (night of 29-30 Feb.) the Viet Cong launched a series of thrusts against five localities. Qui Nhon was attacked at 0410 hours, Kontum at 0200, Pleiku at 0440, Darlac at 0130 and Nha Trang at 0035 hours. During that fateful night, a little before dawn, the Communists also mortared and penetrated the headquarters of the 1st Corps in Danang. They also assaulted military installations in the small town of Hoi An, mortared the city of Quang Tri, the air base in Danang, and the neighboring Non Nuoc airport, while launching a series of ground attacks on many isolated outposts throughout the country.

The enemy was quite successful in the initial phase of offensive campaign. In all the five townships mentioned above, his troops could be seen fighting in downtown areas. The V.C. pressure on Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Pleiku was eliminated rather quickly and took the 1st Corps headquarters garrison only a few hours to dislodge intruders. It took many days for the garrisoning troops in Ban-meht and Kontum to get their situations completely under control.

A bare twenty-four hours after the first holiday strikes, the Viet Cong launched a much larger offensive which concentrated on Saigon and the Mekong delta. In the meantime the central government warned provincial authorities of an impending Communist offensive. On the very first day of the Year of the Monkey (Jan. 30), Radid denounced the Communists for their blatant violations of the holiday ceasefire and announced the abrogation of the truce order.

In the joy of Tet, nonetheless, little attention was paid to these developments. Particularly in Saigon, where members of military garrisons were ordered back to their barracks, there were many who failed to listen to the radio and did not have the slightest
idea what it was all about. In small provincial and district towns the authorities were more successful in communicating their orders to the local troops.

Che sara sara with the Viet Cong nation-wide offensive on and gaining momentum in the first hours of the campaign it was feared that Hanoi was about to realize its final objective of conquering South Vietnam. During the holiday period a total of 28 provincial capitals were attacked along with the sprawling metropolis of Saigon-Cholon. The following summarizes the situation.

In the nation's northermost provinces, militarily known as I Corps, the Communists attacked Hue at 0200 hours on 31 January, then followed up with similar assaults on Quang Tri, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai only two hours after the Hue push. In II Corps - the Highlands and the coastal provinces - Phan Thiet was hit at about the same time while the highland resort of Dalat was attacked during the early hours of 2 February.

In the provinces surrounding Saigon, militarily known as III Corps, the Communists also launched a series of well-coordinated attacks against vital military and political installations during the early hours of 31 January. The headquarters of the 25th Infantry Division in Hau Nghia province was assaulted the following morning. In the early hours of 1 February, installations in Binh Duong and Bien Hoa provinces were assailed. Long-Khanh was to be added to the list the following night.

In the Mekong Delta (IV Corps) Communist pressure was acutely felt in Phong Dinh, Vinh Long (1 Feb.), in Kien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Kien Giang, and Vinh Binh (2 Feb.), in Kien Tuong (4 Feb.), and finally at the headquarters of the 44th Special Zone at Cao Lanh in the early hours of 5 February. Go Cong was the target for another V.C. assault the following night and Bac Lieu was struck five days later.

Chronologically, the V.C. Tet offensive included the following actions:

Tet's Eve: Qui Nhon, Kontum, Pleiku, Darlac, and Nha Trang; all these Cities are located either in the highland or central coast.

31 January: Saigon-Cholon, Gia Dinh, Can Tho and Vinh Long (III and IV Corps); Phan Thiet (II Corps); and Hue, Quang
1 February: Kien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, Go Cong, Kien Giang, Vinh Binh (IV Corps); Binh Duong and Bien Hoa (III Corps); this day the enemy pressure lost some of its momentum throughout the country although in such places as Saigon, Hue, Ban Me Thuot, My Tho and Vinh Long, the situation still could be described dangerous. After sunrise, Kien Tuong town and a few garrisons in Khanh province were attacked but the assailants were quickly repulsed.

2 February: Dalat (II Corps).

3 February: Enemy activities definitely decreased throughout the nation. Only in Hue did the Communists continue their occupation of the Citadel. In other cities the insurgents sought security among the people but they were rooted out. On that and the following day they also attempted to attack the provincial town of Go-Cong headquarters of the 44th Special Military District. They failed.

6 February: The situation in Hue, Saigon, and Can Tho to be a source of worry for military commanders. Particularly Phong Dinh province, in the Mekong delta, V.C. pressure down for a while, then became more intense in mid-February. In parts of the country, especially in I and IV Corps, the Communists continued pounding populated areas with mortars and rockets.

7 February: For the first time in the war the Communists tanks to attack an Allied position. A Communist armored crossed the border from Laos and swept through the small of Lang Vei near Khe Sanh. This brought about the collapse of the system at Lang Vei. Only 72 of the defenders could get through with the remaining 316 men considered either killed or in the meantime U.S. marines joined the Battle of Hue and the Communists from the residential areas of the former capital.

10 February: V.C. troops entered Bac-Lieu City and set houses. Except for Saigon and Hue, all other cities had been cleared of Communist troops by now. The fighting was located in the suburbs and in Hue it was in Cua Huu and the Bach Ho Bridge.

28 of the 48 cities and provincial towns of South Vietnam attacked by the enemy. The remaining 20 only recorded a few...
Evacuation

Refugees became a considerable problem for a Vietnamese administration.
Refugees became a considerable problem for the South Vietnamese administration.

Thousands of people suddenly find themselves homeless refugees in their own towns.
mortar attacks or small harassing actions and some were left completely alone by the Communists. A list of these towns and their situation follows:

Ninh Thuan (calm), Phu Yen (harassment on outskirt), Phu Bon (calm), Lam Dong (harassment at Di Linh MACV, 2 Feb.), Tay Ninh (mortared, 2 Feb.), Long An (mortared, 10 Feb.), Hau Nghia (mortar attacks), Binh Long (calm), Phuoc Tuy (harassment on the outskirts), Phuoc Long (mortared, 7 Feb.), Kien Phong (mortaring of Cao Lanh, 2 Feb.), Ba Xuyen (mortaring of the airport at Soc Trang), Sadec (mortared, 10 Feb.), Chau Doc (mortared, 31 Jan.), An Xuyen (mortared, 31 Jan. and 6 Feb.), Chuong Thien, An Giang, Quang Duc and Binh Tuy (calm), Cam Ranh (calm).

Compared with other Tet targets the above provincial capitals are relatively unimportant. The enemy might have thought that success elsewhere would automatically yield victory in these minor localities. That is probably why regional Viet Cong troops were not used against small and isolated outposts but were deployed along with main force units to attack only target cities. The enemy must have reasoned that if these primary targets fell the secondary ones would necessarily be theirs.

**Second wave**

The Viet Cong general offensive lasted about two weeks, Communist activities slowed down either through friendly pressure or through their own tactical maneuverings. The very heavy losses suffered during the unprecedented two weeks of fighting put the Communists in the position of having to seek some respite and replacements for their depleted ranks. During the night of Saturday, the 17th of February, enemy troops once more made their presence felt throughout the country.

Unlike the Tet actions, however, it did not last long. Although enemy soldiers were seen on the outskirts of many of the nation's big cities and townships, the new Communist attack took the form of stand-off mortar and rocket fires rather than ground assault. A total of 47 South Vietnamese and Allied installations were pounded. This makes the second wave a little different from the first, inasmuch as only GVN and South Vietnamese military installations were hit in the latter.

The mortar raids were followed by ground assaults.
such places as the Binh Loi Bridge area in Saigon, Thu Duc, Tan Phu, Go Vap, Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa and Chau Doc. The most important of these was against the city of Phan Thiet on the central coast.

This followed by a couple of hours the Communist mortar and rocket bombardment of the Tan Son Nhut Air Base (0110 hour), the MACV headquarters (0120), the National Police headquarters on Tran Hung Dao boulevard, and the Phu Lam Radar Station.

On 25 February the enemy again mortared and attacked Cholon provincial town. His troops penetrated the city and barred themselves in the local hospital but were dislodged in the early morning of the following morning. At this time a significant Communist force once more tried to infiltrate into the sprawling metropolis of Cholon but was stopped at Hoc Mon and Phu Tho Hoa to the east and west of the capital. The situation in Hue also came under control after 26 days of continuous fighting.

Hanoi made a big effort to pour arms and ammunition into South Vietnam while the V.C. offensive was on, especially over the period 29 February, within two short hours (from 0100 to 0300), Vietnamese and U.S. ships intercepted three North Vietnamese trawlers off the coast of Duc Pho district in Quang Ngai province, in Khanh Hoa province, and Bo De in An Xuyen province. In two cases the Communist crewmen fought back vigorously but the trawlers were sunk and the third one pursued until it exploded.

A total of 645 rifles, 45 sub-machine-guns and 13 machine-guns were captured in the vessel sunk off the coast of Quang Ngai. Also three ground off the coast of Khanh Hoa province, some rocket launchers, 28 AK, 50 rifles, and many cases of medicine were sunk and the third one pursued until it exploded.

Following these defeats on the sea the Viet Cong again tried wave of assaults throughout South Vietnam. The main offensive action was in the western provinces of South Vietnam, especially the small provincial capital of Quan Long (Can Tho), and the small provincial capital of Chau Doc. The Viet Cong also mortared, for the first time, the airstrip at Chau Doc lightly damaging it. It was all the Communists could do, for they failed to produce any results.
WHAT CRIME HAVE THEY COMMITTED?

What motivated the Communist High Command to send these children to certain death?
Nguyen Van Thang, 12, a member of the Quyet Thang Regiment, was captured by South Vietnamese Marines in Go Vap, on the outskirt of Saigon.
General William C. Westmoreland, U.S. Commander in Vietnam, in the meanwhile, had ordered the formation of a provisional Corps Command in I Corps and appointed General Robert E. Cushman to command it. This change was made to better prepare the troops for a possible North Vietnamese attack on Khe-Sanh.

Little by little normalcy was restored in Saigon and other major cities throughout South Vietnam. The cost of living, which had spiraled during the heated days of February, did not go down. Although it was too early for most people to decide which side had won the first round of battles, the sad reality dawned that the South Vietnamese administration had another load on its shoulders. A great number of people were homeless refugees in their own towns and were badly in need of assistance.

**Friendly reaction**

In the second half of March South Vietnamese and Allied troops had the situation throughout the land under control - especially after they started a series of uninterrupted offensive sweeps around the big cities. Following Operation Tran Hung Dao, which put an end to the Communist presence within the capital city, an unprecedentedly large operation was launched on 11 March. This operation was code-named "Quyet Thang" (Winning Determination). It achieved little although grouping 50,000 troops from six divisions and two task forces in the five provinces surrounding Saigon (Gia Dinh, Long An, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong, and Hau Nghia). On the South Vietnamese side there were elements of the Fifth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry Divisions, an airborne task force, a marine task force, a ranger unit and some police. On the American side there were elements of the First, Ninth, and Twenty-Fifth Divisions.

In the Mekong Delta, Operation Truong Cong Dinh - named after a famous Vietnamese guerrilla leader in the 1860's - was launched on the same pattern. In the northern provinces a series of operations code-named Lam Son were ordered while Operation Mac Arthur, grouping elements of the U.S. Fourth Infantry Division and the ARVN 23rd Division, was conducted in the highlands. In addition there were other regular type operations such as Wallowa Wheeler in Nam Tin and Muscatine in Quang Ngai.

Although these operations were not exactly successful, total Communist losses reached new heights with each passing day.
Thousands of people both at home and abroad responded to the blood donation drive which was initiated when the Communists launched their Tet offensive.
View of a reception center during the Communist 'Tet' offensive.

Enemy casualties, particularly heavy to pour into South after their fighting, included all from around 323,000 Viet Cong strength after 18,600 combat and political cadres. The following : 110,600 and 79,000 personnel in companies. The II Corps, 15 battalions in Cholon, and 15 battalions for all eventualities when troops to counter a loose "encirclement" that thrusts just to everywhere with actions.

One of constant mortal bined with a fall...
ties during the early weeks of the Tet offensive were par-
avy but the Communist High Command somehow managed
South Vietnam as many replacements as needed thus keep-
ning strength at approximately the same level on practi-

Prior to the offensive Communist strength was estimated
000 troops of all types. According to a table of estimated
strength early in March, the Communists lost about 45,000
ows:
000 combat troops, 33,700 support troops, 60,200 guerrilla,
political cadres.

These troops were organized into 97 battalions and 18
They were disposed in various corps areas roughly as
battalions and 18 companies in I Corps, 28 battalions in
battalions in III Corps, especially in the area of Saigon-
9 battalions in IV Corps.

Prior to their Tet offensive the Communists had plans
ailies. Should their attack fail, they would withdraw their
tryside areas bordering on the cities and continue with
element of the townships by the countryside", thus giving
ace to recover. In addition they would also launch a few
keep the Allies preoccupied with territorial defense
ile preventing them from mounting genuine offensive

Commencing in March this strategy was to take the form
tar and rocket attacks on the cities which were com-
 incidental ground assaults of no particular importance.
TERROR

That the enemy ground mortar and rocket could not lead to military victory was soon to many observers.

These attacks served as instruments of terror by means of which the Communists hoped to cow people into submission.
TERROR

That the enemy ground mortar and rocket attacks could not lead to military victory was soon clear to many observers.

These attacks served as instruments of terror by means of which the Communists hoped to cow people into submission.
Destruction and death at the hands of their 'liberation'.

Grandmother with the coffins of her daughter and her daughter-in-law.
The V.C. Offensive plan

The Viet Cong general offensive was planned in minutest detail. The Hanoi leadership expected much, if not total success. The reasons for failure of the plan, therefore, must be traced to its authors' lack of objectivity in assessing the situation, especially their misconception concerning their ability to achieve popular support.

The "general offensive, general uprising" actually began in the Spring of 1967 when Hanoi learned that American troops and their firepower were far superior to that which the French army could muster in the fifties and therefore no decisive victories on the pattern of past actions could be expected. In their review of the strategy for the conquest of the South the Hanoi leadership also came to the conclusion that continuation of the protracted struggle might not lead them anywhere, especially after a top secret group of military experts from North Korea, Communist China, and Cuba also expressed similar views.

In the ensuing months the North Vietnamese Politburo requested a basic change in the Communist strategy for South Vietnam. In its Resolution 13, victory was called for "in the shortest possible time". At about the same time, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, who had been serving as Commander-in-Chief of the Viet Cong forces and Lao-Dong (Communist) Party boss below the 17th Parallel, died. Vo Nguyen Giap, the victor of Dien Bien Phu, was made responsible for planning the Tet offensive.

Communist cadres in South Vietnam attended the first study sessions on the strategy to be adopted for the 1967-68 Winter-Spring Campaign as early as August 1967. In the course of these sessions, constant reference was made to a document entitled "For an Understanding of the New Situation and the New Tasks, "which was widely distributed in one form or another.

Booklet

A copy of this paper was found in Tay-Ninh province on 25 November 1967. The book consisted of ten pages and was dated 1 September 1967. Like all other such documents it has the appearance of a seemingly inoffensive brochure the true nature of which was
hidden under a cover that could be that of any booklet containing the
 teachings of Buddha. On that particular document was printed the
title "Te Do Chung Sinh" or "To Help Mankind", published by Venerable
Minh Tam. Even the name of the publishing house, the Luc Hoa Tang
Publishing Company was included.

Inside the booklet, however, it was labeled "a study doc­
ment for a better understanding of the new situation and the new
facts" and it was meant to be studied by low-ranking cadres and V.C.
 sympathizers. A close examination of this brochure shows four parts:

1. Objective: The V.C. seek the end of the American
presence in South Vietnam through the formation of a coalition govern­
ment with the National Liberation Front playing the leading role in
arrangement.

2. Three-Pronged Task: V.C. troops and cadres have
tasks of seeking the destruction of the U.S. political and military
forces, the collapse of the Vietnamese armed forces, and the pro­
of a popular uprising.

3. Assessment: In assessing the situation in South Viet­
nam, V.C. maintain that the "search and destroy" tactics of the
enemy have failed and that they themselves have achieved "great vic­
tory." They also point to the opening of the Tri-Thien (northern) 
border as an indicator of their success in preventing Westmoreland
from sending more U.S. soldiers to the Mekong Delta and forcing
for more troops.

4. V.C. Shortcomings: A number of shortcomings on the
Viet Cong also are enumerated such as the lack of coordi­
ated operations, their inability to expand guerrilla strength,
performance of some V.C. units, the insufficiency of politi­
ical and the lack of popular support.

The document also specifies that if the U.S. should not
deraw its troops from Vietnam and if it should not
withdraw the right to play a key role in a coalition govern­
ment, communists would continue the fight. The struggle would
be intense large-scale attacks instead of the erstwhile
covert struggle so as to be conducive to victory within
the possible.

The plan of attack, however, was not contained in this
document but was contained in a plan code-named TCK-TKN - the
initial letters of the Vietnamese Tong Cong Kich, Tong Khoi Nghia or "General attacks, General Uprisings" - said to have been devised by General Vo Nguyen Giap himself in the fall of 1967. The Giap plan represented a complete divorce from the traditional Communist three phased blueprint for aggression and conquest.

In the first phase of the plan, which is also called one of preparation, the most important task of V.C. cadres is to start guerrilla warfare while trying to expand their political infrastructure in the countryside. In the second phase of the plan, cadres are ordered to intensify guerrilla warfare and start a war of movement while seeking the expansion of base areas and popular organizations. The final stage of a revolutionary war would be reached sometimes after the launching of the phase of general counter offensive which would culminate in the "takeover of political powers by the masses".

In the thinking of theoreticians of revolutionary warfare, a rebellion movement can only pass from one phase to another in due time and it would be dangerously unorthodox to skip one step. As things were in 1967 it was the view of most observers that the insurgent movement was still in the first stage. Against this context one has to try to see why Vo Nguyen Giap called upon his troops to achieve victory in the shortest possible time.

In October 1967, Giap, Le Duan, and Nguyen Duy Trinh stopped over in Peking on their way to Moscow to take part in the various events marking the 50th Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. It is now common knowledge that the North Vietnamese general sketched for his Chinese counterparts Hanoi's new strategy for a speedy conquest of South Vietnam. The Chinese at first balked at the idea but later changed their minds. They also promised Giap 100,000 support troops and 200,000 personnel for the maintenance of railroads and other communications systems so that more North Vietnamese troops might be freed for combat duties. Hanoi, however, only accepted a token number of these troops along with some 107mm and 240mm rockets and their launchers.

Moscow, on its part, promised help in the form of armored cars and other equipment items unavailable in China.

As Christmas 1967 approached, Lieutenant General Van Tien Dung, the Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese Armed Forces, dispatched what later was to prove his final instructions on the 1967-1968 Winter-Spring Campaign. About one week later, however, Hanoi
Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh talked about the possibilities of peace negotiations with the U.S. Trinh's move possibly intended to mislead Washington on what the Hanoi leadership really had in mind.

A few days later Ho Chi Minh, over Radio Hanoi, read a poem wishing the Vietnamese nation success in the coming of the Monkey. Students of Vietnamese history now agree that the poem contained Hanoi's order for the unprecedented offensive of the Tet. Here follows the text of the poem with a rough translation:

"Xuân này hơn năm mấy xuân qua,
Thắng trận tin vui khắp nước nhà.
Nam Bắc thi đua đánh giặc Mỹ.
Tiện lên!
Toàn thắng ấy về ta!"

"This Springtime certainly will be more joyous than all such previous seasons,
"For news of victories will come from all parts of the country.
"North and South (our people and our soldiers) will compete in the anti-American struggle.
"Forward we go,
And total victory will be ours".

On the surface no one would suspect the real intent of the order for battle. This order was thought by most people a call for more sacrifices in preparation for great victories in the distant future. In reality the Viet Cong leadership used the order as the basis for a study document detailing what the troops were to do when the TCK-TKN Plan was to be implemented.

Even though Giap's blueprint had not been made public, interrogations of prisoners of war, political returnees and following the Tet attacks, revealed an idea of the TCK-TKN's code name consisting of two parts "TCK" and "TKN" possibly conceived to include two phases: that of general uprisings.

The TCK-TKN provided for simultaneous attacks against the South Vietnamese which would then be followed by a move conducive to an overthrow of the present administration of a new government. The plan also provided in the event of a failure in the first phase. In that
event, the "general offensive, general uprising" would merely be another annual military campaign similar to those of previous years.

Bad failure

Militarily the TCK-TKN Plan turned out to be a very bad failure for the Communists.

In launching their Winter-Spring Campaign of 1967 the Communists wanted to forcefully turn world public opinion to their favour. They desired to create a psychology of fear among the South Vietnamese masses. At the same time they hoped to impose upon the Saigon administration the unbearable burden of sponsoring a refugee assistance program throughout the country.

The real purposes which prompted Hanoi to embark on the TCK-TKN campaign were not those outlined above. According to a high-ranking Viet Cong cadre, who was arrested while on his way to attend a session of the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), the reasons were of a military nature. Nam Dong, alias Can, told his interrogators that the TCK-TKN "was neither an ordinary campaign nor one staged with the intention of scoring a propaganda victory. It was a campaign designed to bring about a decisive victory and end the war".

According to Nam Dong, the strategy adopted was totally different from the classical Communist plan during the war against the French due to the following four considerations:

1) France's military might was relatively weak while America's present strength is incomparable; (2) In the War against the French, the victory of Dien Bien Phu was directly instrumental in bringing about the Geneva agreements. No such victories could be expected against the Americans; (3) With the classical three-phased strategy based on the principle of encirclement of the townships by the countryside, the Communists were steadily expanding their control over the countryside in the course of the first Indochina War. Against the U.S.-Vietnam alliance the traditional Communist strategy in the sixties failed to give Hanoi any decisive victories, thus bringing the war in pretty much the first phase of Mao Tse Tung's blueprint for revolutionary wars; (4) The Hanoi leadership also understood by 1967 that should the conflict go on for sometime it would attrite North Vietnam and bring about the collapse of the Communist regime.
In assessing the situation the Hanoi leadership also came to three sets of conclusions which prompted them to embark on the strategic road. In the days immediately preceding the Tet offensive the Hanoi leaders thought that the South Vietnamese masses were likely to shift their allegiance to the Communists based on the merits of such movements as the People's Salvation Movement, the Buddhist struggle campaigns, and the constant division among nationalist parties. They also thought that the South Vietnamese disaffected Americans and were so unhappy with the war that they would overthrow the administration of President Nguyen-Van-

Secondly, they thought the South Vietnamese regime had weakened following the downfall of Ngo Dinh Diem that its army had ceased to be efficient, both in the defensive and the offensive. In the third place, they also must have reckoned, that following successes in 1966-67, the Communists really stood a chance of bringing an all-out offensive campaign to a successful conclusion especially since they had the benefits of "two strategic opportunities and one tactical advantage".

The first strategic opportunity was the U.S. presidential election in 1968. Candidates such as Richard M. Nixon and Hubert Humphrey were criticizing President Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam policy and adding more oil to the antiwar fire in the U.S. The Communists also must have thought that if the general attacks were successful, the internal difficulties encountered by the ouster of Diem would make it impossible for Johnson to send more troops to South Vietnam and reduce it to seeking negotiations favorable to the Communists.

The second strategic opportunity was the mounting antiwar movement around the world which could be traced to its participation in the Vietnam war. Again, in Hanoi's view, a series of big victories in the crystallization of such current of public opinion and ending the protracted Vietnam crisis, that made it impossible for Johnson to resist.

In addition since both sides had proclaimed a stand down in 1967, there was a significant tactical advantage to be gained from surprise attacks to be mounted during the holiday period. The Communist High Command, of course, was fully
confident that its plan would be successful but it also took comfort in two possible developments in the event the master plan of Vo Nguyen Giap failed. Giap reportedly thought that the insurgent movement was firmly entrenched in the jungle and countryside of South Vietnam. He thought that even if the offensive against the cities should turn into a debacle, its strength would remain unchanged.

Giap also reckoned that the offensive campaign would perforce result in many casualties on the attackers but this would not be too serious since North Vietnam’s source of manpower would remain intact in spite of the pounding of its territory from the air. In Giap’s calculation the ability of Hanoi to replace casualties was about three times greater than Saigon’s, that of North Vietnam plus one half of South Vietnam.

With the TCK-TKN Plan, Communist commanders hoped to derive maximum advantage from the limited number of combatants they could field. They hoped to take some of the key military installations and, with the help of popular uprisings, to take over the administration of the land. They also thought that in the face of such a completely novel situation the Americans would be reduced to throwing in the towel as they would find themselves in the impossible situation of using airpower against such populated areas as Saigon with its 3,000,000 people.

Moreover they must have reckoned that with the emergence of a new “government”, all undefeated Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units would have to surrender. In the case of hardcore GVN, they would reduce them one by one militarily or would proselytize them with the help of military dependents and Communist sympathizers.

The Communist High Command deployed many of their best political cadres in their attacks against the cities and townships with the hope of fostering several disturbances leading to the formation of a new administration. They especially launched a new movement called the National Alliance of Peace and Democratic Forces (NAPDF) which purportedly was a front grouping all political parties and factions in South Vietnam.

The new front was nothing but another organization created and directed by Hanoi pretty much the same way the National Liberation Front (NLF) was launched some years before. Conscious of the fact that the NLF was too closely identified with it, the Hanoi regime
give the NLF a new image allowing it to publish a political program. This was decided to enlarge the political organization but the move did not fool many people.

NAPDF, along with the Winter-Spring Campaign, was used to give the Communist propaganda media in an effort at the support of the intellectuals in the cities and give the NLF movement an honorable appearance in the event of the formation of a coalition government. In the capital city of Saigon, NAPDF gave the time to do anything. It was later learned that its Cen­tral Committee included such figures as Attorney Trinh To (chairman), Mr. Lam Van Tet, and Venerable Thich Don, the Buddhist struggle movement in Hue. In the former imperial capital, the local NAPDF organization was more successful. It was to the public and had enough time to be at the origin of quite a few disturbances.

The TCK-TKN Plan was such a detailed plan that it also spread the spreading of a rumors. According to one such rumor, would only attack South Vietnamese installations and units save the Americans alone in keeping with the terms of a manent between the Viet Cong and the U.S. In reality V.C. their best to avoid attacking U.S. installations. That fact, pre-Tet rumors and developments, created some uneasi­ South Vietnamese relations.

A few months before Tet, at about the same time Nguyen Van Lém, North Vietnam was ready for negotiating an end to the war. Some NLF representatives reportedly arrived in Sai­gon. The U.S. Embassy. One of the Viet Cong emissaries, believed then, was captured by police. In the ensuing Director General Nguyen Ngoc Loan reportedly sub­signation in protest of U.S. interference in internal ese affairs. The rumor went that the Council of Minis­consider Loan's request and asked him to stay on.

According to the same rumor, South Vietnamese inflexi­Viet Cong was instrumental in Washington's secret allow Communist troops to pass and attack GVN in the same reasoning, such a direct confrontation between the two would give the Americans the golden opportunity the capabilities of the Viet Cong vis-a-vis their allies so that a really practical approach could be
devised to a possible negotiated settlement of the war.

This rumor, it goes without saying, was groundless. The U.S. High Command was genuinely taken aback by the scale of the Tet attacks which were directed against 28 cities and towns. No such developments had been foreseen in any of Washington's many contingency plans. More often than not U.S. troops, even without being directly challenged, joined in the battles on the side of their South Vietnamese comrades. Only in some instances did the lack of communications and the confusing situation prevent U.S. troops from coming to the assistance of their South Vietnamese allies in the first days of the V.C. offensive.

Apparently, all these moves - offer of peace talks and secret contacts - were merely intended to give the Americans the impression that all was not well in the Hanoi-Viet Cong association. While proclaiming Hanoi's intention to seek a negotiated settlement of the war, Nguyen Duy Trinh possibly only sought to mislead U.S. public opinion and Washington officials on what the North Vietnamese leader really had in mind. They sought to establish preliminary contacts with America so that it would speedily lead to a full fledged parley in the event of a successful general offensive.

The Communists' failure to bring pressure on U.S. installations throughout the land might simply have been the result of a shortage of combat troops but it might also have been a premeditated move to sow dissension between the Americans and the South Vietnamese, a move to create a feeling of insecurity among GVN troops and convince the common people in the cities that they had nothing to fear in joining the ranks of the revolution, especially at a moment when the war was raging in downtown sections of all population centers.

Implementation

Now let us have a look at how the TCK-TKN Plan was implemented.

For many weeks prior to the Tet holiday the enemy had infiltrated a considerable amount of arms and ammunition into the cities and townships of South Vietnam. This was done in a million ways but one of the most successful methods was to fill the lower part of trucks with deadly weapons and explosive and put atop of these all such Tet supplies as water melons. Invariably such simple tricks turned out to be so effective that not a single case of arms smuggling.
The interrogation of prisoners in the ensuing days was revealing that in quite a few instances war materiel was hidden in loads of sand and kept under sand mounds until H-hour, when easily retrieved. In other cases Viet Cong city workers hid deadly instruments in coffins and buried them in various strategically located cemeteries. As the moment arrived for going onto the streets, they dug them up and used the cemeteries as gathering points for troop movement.

The enemy High Command also had hundreds of cadres in urban areas. Each of these had his own mission, as part of the great plan. Let it simply be said that Communist infiltrators knew where to go when they arrived in town, how to enter into contact with their commanders, and what to do while awaiting H-hour. Particularly, sapper troops were told to prepare carefully for urban battles as the Communist High Command was convinced that the outcome depended to a great extent on the performance of the troops.

As Tet approached, thousands of Viet Cong soldiers opened the cities disguised as civilians and armed with fake identification papers of all sorts. These Viet Cong were feted by local leaders and Communist representatives and were taken to their targets for on-the-spot studies prior to attacking them.

A reconstruction of the Viet Cong plan of battle indicated three principles guiding their efforts everywhere:

1. Targets selected for the initial phase of the campaign were key military and administrative installations where the Communist High Command can rely on sapper units, either previously trained or kept on city fringes, to conduct the attack. These units were well equipped with B.40 and B.41 individual rocket launchers mounted on AK family rifles. They hoped to overcome resistance speedily by use of surprise attacks.

2. While sapper troops were attacking from within, artillery pressure would be brought to bear on the Allies from the outskirts, especially in the form of artillery bombardments. The attack, however, was made an exception with the assailants retreating using their big guns against this populated area.

3. In addition to the military prong of the attack, the
Communist High Command also planned a political assault against the cities. The political assault was carried out by a substantial number of troops and agents in populated areas, especially in the poor sections of the cities. The Communist campaign was planned with the participation of political agents whose role was to incite the population to revolt and demand the formation of a new administration.

Hanoi had infiltrated some 300 intellectuals of all professions and fanned them out to various regions of South Vietnam in preparation for the Winter-Spring Campaign. Their purpose was one of creating a political and cultural front for the regimentation of the masses following an expected rout of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

The Communist High Command ordered a total of 97 battalions on the move for the general offensive. Although these units boasted local names, they included a great many North Vietnamese who had only arrived South a couple of months before. Most infiltrators were teenagers. Some of them were children who were barely 15 years of age.

Why the Hanoi regime dispatched these children to certain death remains a matter of pure speculation. Morally the decision was criminal. Militarily the decision was also a bad one since these inexperienced combatants, fighting in very unfamiliar terrain, could not be expected to achieve a great deal. This was one of the reasons why the Communists failed to achieve anything of lasting consequence in their Tet offensive.

The above observations, however, should not obscure the fact that the Communists were able to keep their TCK-TKN Plan completely secret until the time of implementation. They also were quite successful in coordinating their attacks according to a master plan which was initially intended for implementation on Tet eve.

Strategically and tactically the insurgents relied on two key principles of Communist military dogma. They sought maximum surprise by moving their troops as speedily as possible from bases to target areas. As the moment arrived for launching the offensive, they also sought to confuse Allied commanders by pretending to mount attacks at places other than already chosen targets. Khe Sanh and some border outposts were such secondary targets. Hanoi military leaders were really directing their main efforts at Saigon and other big cities.