ASSESSMENT & STRATEGY
MARCH 1968
TET 1968 "LESSONS LEARNED"

USAF
Lessons Learned from the Enemy Offensive During TET (U)

TO: All 7AF Wing and Group Commanders

An attachment to this letter is a comprehensive summary of "Lessons Learned" from the attacks on Tan Son Nhat and Bien Hoa for your guidance as an interim measure. Most of these items are being incorporated into 7AF OPLAN 355-68 or 7AF Supplement 1 to AFM 355-1. The Inspector General will use this summary and, when issued, the guidance contained in referenced documents as a basis for monitoring this as a special subject for inspection.

FOR THE COMMANDER

LOUIS T. SEITH, Brig Gen, USAF
Chief of Staff

1 Atch.
(C) Summary of Lessons Learned

"This letter is UNCLASSIFIED
Atch __________ is withdrawn."
SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

PROBLEM: (C) Dual radio frequencies on large installations and single frequencies on small installations became saturated during increased combat activity, and complicated the centralized control of security forces. The probability of frequency jamming by the enemy also existed. As a minimum, all security police squadrons must possess dual frequency capability, and larger squadrons require a multi-frequency capability to assure total combat communications effectiveness.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) A letter to DEC on 21 Feb 68, subject "Non-Tactical Radios", requested dual frequencies for small installations and multifrequencies for large installations.

PROBLEM: (U) Defense positions without spotlights are unable to illuminate suspected or actual enemy movement approaching the perimeter, or inside, if penetration is successful. Heavy duty spotlights are essential, particularly Xenon lighting which has a high intensity focusing capability on the area under observation.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) All PSP commanders were directed by letter dated 22 Feb 68, subject, "Security Police Equipment", to order all required items to assure a positive defense posture. This letter will be referred to in the following 5 problems as "ACTION TAKEN".

PROBLEM: (U) Suspected movement outside of the perimeter in obscured and/or densely foliated areas and areas at a great distance from the perimeter cannot be observed by security forces without Starlight Scopes. Because of eye irritation experienced in the sustained use of the Starlight Scopes and the limited number of scopes in operation, they must be staggered in use and position. The total number throughout the command must be increased to assure adequate surveillance capabilities during hours of darkness.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) All commanders were directed by letter to order additional Starlight Scopes.

PROBLEM: (C) One attack resulted in the brief enemy occupation and control of a security police bunker and illustrates the need for a counterattack capability by security forces to retake bunkered positions. Heavier weapons than those presently in the security police inventory are necessary to be totally combat effective.
ACTION TAKEN: (C) All commanders were directed by letter to order heavier weapons, 90MM recoiless rifles, and 81MM mortars. A limited number of 90MM recoiless rifles have been received and distributed to higher threat bases.

PROBLEM: (C) Due to the limitation of heavy duty spotlights mounted from defensive positions and the short illumination duration of slap-flares, the need for mortar flare illumination was evidenced. Although flares from AC-47 aircraft are of adequate intensity, they cannot be pinpointed as accurately as mortar flares, additionally these aircraft cannot be relied upon if involved in other operations. The 81MM mortar can fire illumination flares on a pinpoint basis with enough frequency to provide sustained illumination at distances over 3000 meters from the firing point.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) Commanders were directed to order 81MM mortars and include flares as well as HE in their requisitions.

PROBLEM: (C) Vehicles currently utilized by Security Police response forces, i.e., M/51 jeeps and flat bed trucks are unrealistic and inadequate for increased operations during base attacks. Enemy assaults demonstrated the necessity of armored vehicles for the movement of personnel and prompt aggressive engagement with the enemy as far away from priority resources as possible. Armored personnel carriers (APC) can best fill this void and provide a heavy weapons capability.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) Use of armored vehicles is now under study.

PROBLEM: (C) The TET offensive revealed that the enemy is not committed to a pattern, particularly during heavy encounters. Rocket and mortar attacks took place in the early evening and during daylight hours and almost suicidal penetrations of the perimeter were attempted regardless of the counter threat. This dates the value of previous known enemy patterns. The enemy is aware of laxity, our intelligence estimates and our preoccupation with his past pattern of events, order of battle and indiscriminate probes against our installations. He will continue to use means that make his attack simple and inexpensive, and use our own estimate of his capabilities against us. The best defense is to have adequate security equipment or forces inplace or available to counter the threat.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) Part of program 5 was a request for additional personnel and commanders were directed to order heavier weapons.
PROBLEM: (U) The inability of external security forces to deny or prevent movement outside the perimeter drew attention to the threat posed at all base perimeters. A "sanitized" or free-fire zone as far outward as feasible from perimeters (preferably up to one mile) is a necessity to counter this threat. Additionally this free-fire zone would allow tactical defense techniques, i.e., patrol, ambush, area development, permit the use of heavier weapons, and increase the effective coverage of anti-intrusion alarm systems.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) Surveys are being conducted at all bases; the results will be analyzed and staffed by TAF ICS.

PROBLEM: (C) Immediate threats to USAF installations require a rapid upgrading of security alert conditions. Due to a shortage of personnel and increased security conditions, shift hours were extended excessively. To adequately sustain this necessary level of security posture without over extending the capacity of security personnel, additional manpower authorizations are essential.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) Additional Security Policemen including a "Sideside Squadron" as backup have been requested and supported by PACAF.

PROBLEM: (U) Installations not protected by adequate security fencing and lighting were dangerously exposed to penetration or massive attack through insecure perimeters. Perimeter defense is the first line of defense and the enemy must be repulsed there to prevent further penetration. Lighting controlled in "sectors" to facilitate use of night observation devices will illuminate enemy movement at the perimeter and adequate fencing will impede enemy penetration long enough for security forces to respond.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) All commanders were directed by TAF (CS) Ltr, 21 Feb 68, "Lessons Learned", to survey perimeter fences and lights for adequacy, if none exists programming action will be taken. This letter will be referred to in the following two problems.

PROBLEM: (C) Mine fields which were not periodically surveyed and replanted were of limited value. Security police squadrons must coordinate with EOD on the most effective utilization of these fields. Shortly a new weapon, the 40MM rapid fire grenade cannon, will be entered into the inventory which may be as effective as a mine field and provide the user with more latitude.
ACTION TAKEN: (U) Commanders were directed to resurvey and replant mine fields as required.

PROBLEM: (U) On some installations only Security Police and a few other personnel were fully equipped with protective items that allow them the greatest latitude in operating under combat conditions. Firemen, medics, EOD and other personnel equally exposed to combat conditions must possess flak vests and other appropriate field equipment where necessary.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) Commanders were directed to make field equipment, flak vests and other protective items available to personnel who must be exposed during attacks. This requirement will be included in the 7AF Disaster Preparedness Plan.

PROBLEM: (U) The limitations of security police augmentees became apparent during their sustained use. General training given to augmentees and AZR 81150 course for security policemen was inappropriate, lacking in content and value and inequitable considering the environment they operate in. The limited war environment training program needs revision because of the new weapons, equipment, and tactics envisioned for future security force use. To cope with the immediate situation involving augmentees, BSPs must be as selective as possible and contributing squadrons must avoid using poorly trained personnel for augmentee defense duties.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) A letter to revise the security police and augmentee training for Vietnam based personnel is being prepared and will be forwarded to PACAF.

PROBLEM: (U) Under combat conditions or sustained periods of increased security vigilance, the need for medical support in the field became obvious, particularly during the attack-repulse phase when casualties were at a peak. If a security force member is required to aid wounded personnel his mission of base defense is hampered; therefore, field medics are essential to combat field operations.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) A letter was sent to the 7AF SG setting forth the need for field medics and his comments and/or recommendations were requested.

PROBLEM: (U) During base attacks flight operations and maintenance activities were required to turn off their lights or security forces were required to move from their areas to avoid being silhouetted.
ACTION TAKEN: (U) Commanders have been directed to formulate plans for keeping essential areas lighted even under attacks in order to perform mission essential tasks. This subject will be included in OPLAN 207-XX.

PROBLEM: (U) Many personnel were forced to remain in BCQ and BEQ facilities for an extended period of time with limited food, water, weapons and medical supplies.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) A letter from the 7AF Commander, 16 Feb 68, C/O Base Protection, directed that emergency defense kits and weapons be maintained in BCQ/BEQs. This subject will be included in the 7AF Disaster Preparedness Plan and a rewrite of AFR 125-22/7AF Sec 1.

PROBLEM: (C) The utilization of Vietnamese security forces in segregated portions of the base perimeter appears problematic because of their limited communications capability with General Security Control. The integrated use of Vietnamese security forces for base perimeter defense will provide them an improved communications capability and promote a closer working relationship with USAF security forces.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) Commanders were directed to institute such programs with 7AF Staff assistance when required. This item will be included in OPLAN 207-XX.

PROBLEM: (U) Due to the lack of sufficient and timely pre-attack intelligence, a fast acting intelligence warning system is an absolute necessity. To supplement this system a transmitting instrument must be available for area sources.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) CSI has submitted a requirement for a two-way clandestine device for use by source agents to warn of pending attacks or transmit other important intelligence. AFSC is presently working on a solution to this problem. 7AF DPL will develop a SEACR to obtain the instrument.

PROBLEM: (U) Delays in reporting damage estimate and casualties to HQ 7AF resulted in the following conditions:

a. Saturation of telephone communications both in obtaining and dispensing this information.

b. The value of the information to other 7AF units was degraded because of the time required to dispense it.
ACTION TAKEN: (U) The CPREP-3 (checklist 1-6) has been revised to indicate the necessary items and PACAFM 55-3 is being amended accordingly. Commanders have been directed to telephonically submit an updated report of enemy actions at 0700 hours daily using the CPREP-3 checklist. Reports will be from Base Command Post to the 7AF TACC.

PROBLEM: (U) One of the most difficult items to locate and keep in sufficient supply during the TET offensive was M-16 cleaning kits.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) Seventh Air Force (DMSA) Msg 100917Z Feb 68, "M-16 Cleaning Supplies", was sent to all commanders urging their attention to this problem. A 7AF DMS letter is being staffed directing the ordering and maintenance of sufficient stock levels to prevent recurrence.

PROBLEM: (U) Procurement, storage, issuing and accountability of emergency rations.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) 7AF DMSS Msg 120305Z Feb 68 directed 7AF bases to reevaluate subsistence stock levels to insure an adequate supply of A and B ration subsistence items are on hand at all times to provide a level to meet emergencies and to insure that positive control of C rations is maintained.

PROBLEM: (U) Need for WRM Base Recovery Kits.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) A study has been completed by 7AF DCS/M. After coordination, a request will be submitted to PACAF requesting approval to establish WRM recovery kits. Kits would include portable generators, vehicles, fire fighting equipment, maintenance and munitions, AGE, rifles and machine guns, personal equipment and civil engineering housekeeping support items.

PROBLEM: (U) Lack of qualified vehicle operators when local nationals do not report for duty.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) 7AF CPLAN 355-68 will task commanders to incorporate a vehicle operator augmentation policy within the Base CPLAN 355-68.

PROBLEM: (C) Inadequate or nonexisting revetments for mission essential facilities. Mission capability could be impaired or destroyed if essential facilities are not afforded proper protection.
PROBLEM: (C) Need for disaster response forces during an attack. Some attacks require disaster response forces, i.e., security police, medics, fire fighters and EOD teams to perform vital functions while the attack is still in progress.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) 7AF (CS) Ltr, 21 Feb 68. Reexamination of Base Revetment/Hardening Progress, directs bases to identify and protect those mission essential facilities at each base and to identify significant discrepancies and problem areas. Revetment progress regarding facilities listed in referenced letter will be included in the monthly report of revetment/hardening progress presently required by 7AF (CS), with copies to DCO and DCE.

PROBLEM: (C) Need for a limited fuel resupply capability.

ACTION TAKEN: (C) 7AF CPPLAN 355-68 will task the base fuels office to pick up limited quantities of MCCAS and diesel fuel from Army Re-supply points when stocks become critical and the Army cannot make deliveries. A study has been made by 7AF DMS to determine what additional storage facilities are required to insure a minimum 15 days and maximum 30 days supply of POL at each base. Upon finalization of study, approval will be requested from PACAF to support these requirements.

PROBLEM: (U) Inadequacy of Base Recall Plans. Base recall plans in some cases were not adequate to insure expedient return of personnel necessary to sustain key mission and mission support functions.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) 7AF message 080601Z Feb 68 directed all commanders to immediately examine their current emergency recall plans and to advise this Hq (DCO) of completed action by 12 Feb 1968.

PROBLEM: (U) Curtailment or cessation of operational missions during or under threat of attack.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) 7AF Msg 060400Z Feb 68, from the Commander, was sent to all commanders emphasizing when and under what conditions flying activities are to be restricted. The decision to curtail flying activities is to be made by commanders only when the risk of loss exceeds the expected gain of the missions. Decisions to curtail flying and essential support activities based on the threat of an attack will be made only with the approval of the Commander, 7AF.

PROBLEM: (U) Need for disaster response forces during an attack. Some attacks require disaster response forces, i.e., security police, medics, fire fighters and EOD teams to perform vital functions while the attack is still in progress.
ACTION TAKEN: (U) The decision to call vital forces from shelter during an attack must be made by the Commander after weighing all possible resulting effects against losses. However, some system of alerting individuals must be devised. An area or "Block" warden should be appointed to receive and pass on instructions to personnel sheltered in bunkers under his control.

PROBLEM: (U) Need for rapid dissemination of information to personnel during and immediately following an attack. Many personnel were not informed of events taking place and were unsure of what was expected of them. This resulted in the circulation of rumors which caused confusion and uneasiness among personnel.

ACTION TAKEN: (U) 7AF (CS) Msg 100415Z Feb 68, "Base Public Address System", directed commanders to take the following measures to satisfy interim PA system requirements pending acquisition and installation of permanent base wide systems:

a. Existing PA systems will be brought up to optimum operating efficiency.

b. Available portable systems will be prepositioned in critical base areas not served by existing base PA systems and a coordinated plan for their use developed.

c. Available mobile systems will be given assigned areas of operation during emergency conditions and a coordinated plan for their use developed.

d. 7AF DE provided engineering data on "Building Block" subsystem packages applicable to each specific base area to enable base communications officers to plan a suitable system. Equipment totals and cost figures for each base were consolidated and presented to the SEA telephone conference on 26 February 1968 for a decision by USAF, PACAF, AFLC and GEEIA representatives.

PROBLEM: (U) Lack of defoliation of areas surrounding base. The lack of defoliation in some areas provided cover and concealment for ingress and egress of enemy troops.

RECOMMENDATION: (C) Commanders should vigorously pursue this subject at the local level to insure compliance with MACV Directive 525-1 (C). Any unsuccessful attempts should be documented and forwarded to 7AF IGS.