HISTORY OF THE
273 VC REGIMENT
July 1964 - December 1969
SUBJECT: History of the 273 VC Regiment

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Forwarded for your information are two copies of a study prepared by the AC of S, G2, this headquarters, on the 273 VC Regiment.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

2 Incl

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REGRADED UNCLASSIFIED WHEN SEPARATED FROM CLASSIFIED INCLOSURE
This study of the 273 VC Regiment is the third in a series of VC/NVA regimental histories prepared by the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G2, Headquarters, United States Army, Vietnam. The previous studies covered the 95C NVA Regiment, August 1968 - May 1969, and the 88 NVA Regiment, 1967 - June 1969.

The history of the 273 VC Regiment covers:

- the origins in ARVN IV CTZ of the T80, T70 and 263 Dong Thap Battalions which moved to Tay Ninh Province in late 1964 to form the 273 Regiment;

- the operations of the 273 Regiment in the ARVN III CTZ while a component of the 9 VC Division from 1965 - 1969;

- the return to ARVN IV CTZ in the spring of 1969 and subsequent operations there through mid-December 1969.

Because the 273 VC Regiment participated, as part of the 9 VC Division, in attacks against Saigon during the Tet 1968 Offensive and again during the Post Tet 1969 Offensive, this study provides substantive information on the objectives of these two major enemy offensive efforts.

This document represents a compilation of intelligence derived from numerous sources within the Republic of Vietnam. The contribution and cooperation of the following organizations are particularly acknowledged:

a. Order of Battle Branch, Combined Intelligence Center Vietnam, J2-USMACV and J2-JGS (RVNAF High Command).

b. G2 Section, II Field Force Vietnam.

c. G2 Section, 1 US Infantry Division.

d. G2 Section, 25 US Infantry Division.

e. G2 Section, ARVN IV Corps and G2 Section, Delta Military Assistance Command.
HISTORY OF THE 273 VC REGIMENT
"THE LOC NINH REGIMENT"
December 1964 - 15 December 1969

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(U) MAPS (U)

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Throughout this study, the maneuver battalions of the 273 VC Regiment will be called the 1, 2 and 3 Battalions. They have used several other designations over the years, the most common being: 707, 709, 711, T17, T18, T19 and 7, 8, 9. Other regimental elements will be called by their normal designations. AKAs for the 9 Division, 273 Regiment, and subordinate units are shown below.

Organizational chart is at Figure 1.

9 VC Division

Cong Truong (Worksite) 9, abbreviated as CT9.

273 VC Infantry Regiment

3 Regiment, E3, F3, H3, Pe, Q3, CU III, Doan (Group) 3 A7, C7, V7.

A30, D30, Doan 30

Doan 37

C59, F59, Doan 59

Doan 69, Doan 69C, 69 Transportation Group

73 Regiment, Doan 73

C105C

Doan 207B

273 Regiment, Q273

D500, Doan 500

Infiltration Group 614

E643, Doan 643

673 Regiment

Doan 730

Q763
Dong Thap, 63 Dong Thap, 263 Dong Thap

10 Artillery Battalion

E3, Q3
9B
Doi 7
D10, H-10, Z10, 2-10, 710

Separate Companies

Mortar, 82mm
Recoilless Rifle, 75mm
Antiaircraft, 12.7mm HMG
Engineer
Signal
Reconnaissance
Transportation
Medical
Convalescent
Assault Youth
Training

(C) REGIMENTAL COMMANDERS (U)

Chin Hien AKA Nguyen Van Hien
Dec 64 - May 66
Nam Phong
May 66 - Dec 66
Chin May
Dec 66 - 69
Bay Hue AKA Nguyen Van Hue
69
NOTE: All regiment commanding officers and most other key senior officers are, and always have been regroupees, i.e., South Vietnamese veterans of the Viet Minh who went to North Vietnam in 1954 and infiltrated back to South Vietnam prior to and during the early 1960s. There are reports (documents and interrogations) that cite other individuals as the regiment commanding officer at various times; however, the above list is considered the most accurate one.

(C) ACTIVATION AND LINEAGE (U)
(Maps 1, 2)

The decision by COSVN to form the 273 VC Regiment probably was made in early 1964. The regiment began to form in July or August with the arrival of its first two battalions (T80, T70) in Tay Ninh Province. The third battalion (263 Dong Thap) arrived in December, and the 273 Regiment was activated on 22 December 1964 in the Bau Gon (XT 4351) Northern Boi Loi Woods (XT 4341) base area (Part of MACV Base Area 357). Its battalions had come from the VC western and central Nambo regions (now MR3 and MR2 in the Delta, GVN IV CTZ).

The 1 Battalion was the oldest unit, having been activated in western Nambo in 1959 as the 80 Battalion. It was redesignated the 96 Battalion in 1960 and as the T80 Battalion in 1962, by which time battalion and company level command and cadre positions had been assumed by regroupees. The battalion commander, Chin Hien, later became the commander of D Regiment of western Nambo and, in turn, the first commander of the 273 Regiment, retaining that position until reassigned to COSVN in the spring of 1966. In August 1962 the T80 Battalion was located in the U Minh Forest area (MACV Base Area 483) of VC Rach Gia Province and consisted of 350 men organized into four companies.

In 1962, the T80, 306 and U Minh 10 Battalions provided cadre for the new T70 Battalion, which was activated in An Xuyen Province. The new battalion, along with T80 and 306, constituted the Tay Do Regiment (AKA D Regiment), the only regiment then in western Nambo.

In the spring of 1964, elements of T70 and T80 were ordered to Tay Ninh Province to establish the 273 Regiment, while other members of the two battalions stayed behind to form the 303 Battalion, which joined the 306 and U Minh 1 (AKA 309) Battalions to constitute the D2 Regiment, MR3.

The 263 Dong Thap Battalion (AKA 63 Battalion, 63 Dong Thap Battalion, Ba Dao Battalion) was organized in Thanh Phong Village (XR 7686), Kien Hoa Province. It was staffed with cadre from the 514 and 516 Local Force Battalions of VC Ben Tre Province and by regroupees in June 1963. The 293 Local Force Company of Thanh Phu District became the L Company. Half the battalion's
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273 VC INF REGT

7

8

9

10

CONVALESCENT UNIT

K24

K17

K18

K20

K22

K16

K19

K21

Figure #1
soldiers came from Kien Hoa Province, the remainder from Dinh Tuong Province and Long An Province. The 263 Dong Thap Battalion trained in the Con Rung (Con Forest) (XR 8192), and Giao Dian (XR 7898). It was formally activated in January 1964 with 600 men organized into three infantry companies, a combat support company and a headquarters. The same month, ARVN operations in Thanh Phu District forced the battalion to move to Ba Tri District; still suffering heavy losses, the 263 Dong Thap Battalion moved successively to Mo Cay District, Kien Hoa Province; Cai Be District, Dinh Tuong Province; and, in August, to Hau Nghia Province. It then operated in Hau Nghia and Long An Provinces, unsuccessfully attacking Duc Hue CIDG Camp (XT 3408) in November 1964. The attack failed despite three assaults, because the crew of the 57mm recoilless rifle that was to destroy the command bunker forgot to remove the muzzle cover before firing and killed themselves.

In December 1964, the 263 Dong Thap Battalion received orders to move to Tay Ninh Province to join the 273 Regiment. Approximately 30 cadre returned at this time to Kien Hoa Province to establish a new battalion in the Con Forest. Despite its losses, the 263 Dong Thap Battalion is reported to have arrived in the Bau Gon Zone (XT 4351) with six companies totaling 800 men. Two companies were detached, one being reassigned to each of the other two battalions of the regiment.

The 273 Regiment received new weapons in January and February 1965 and conducted training until April in the Bau Gon-Boi Loi Woods base area (Part of MACV Base Area 357).

(C) FORMATION OF THE 9 VC DIVISION (U) (Map 2)

The 9 VC Division was formed by COSVN in June 1965 with the mission of operating in Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, and Binh Long Provinces. It was composed of the 271, 272 and 273 VC Regiments, then known as Q761, Q762 and Q763.

The 271 is the oldest VC regiment in GVN III CTZ, having been activated in July 1961 in War Zone C with the strength of a reinforced battalion. The second battalion was formed in September 1961, and the third battalion was added in June 1963. In July 1963, the 271 (then known as C56) was redesignated Q761. Throughout 1963, the regiment operated most often from bases in the Bau Gon-Boi Loi Woods (Part of MACV Base Area 357).

The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 272 (AKA Q762) Regiment, were formed in War Zone D (MACV Base Area 359), in August and October 1961, cadred by regroupes. By late 1962, the two battalions had been grouped into a regiment designated C58, and in January 1963 the 3rd Battalion was formed, cadred from squad leader level up by regroupes. In April 1963, the regiment, which had been operating in War Zone D, moved to the Con Rung (Con Forest) (Part of MACV Base Area 357) and was redesignated Q762.
During mid-1963, the two regiments (Q761, Q762) continued to operate separately but now in close proximity, with Q761 on the western side of the Saigon River in the Boi Loi Woods and the Q762 on the eastern side in the Trapezoid (Part of MACV Base Area 356). In mid-1964, they both began movements that brought them to Phuoc Tuy Province for the December Binh Gia Campaign. It was following this campaign, for which the 271 Regiment was awarded the title Binh Gia Regiment, that it returned to War Zone D and the 272 Regiment to War Zone C, to be joined by the 273 Regiment in the formation of the 9 Division.

(C) ZX CAMPAIGN, MAY - JUL 1965 (U)
(Map 3)

The ZX (AKA Dong Xoai or Song Be) Campaign of 1965 probably was the first action controlled by the 9 VC Division, although some reports indicate that it was 1966 before the division headquarters was fully operational. However, the campaign was the first in which the 271, 272 and 273 VC Regiment all operated together.

In April, the 273 Regiment began to move from its Bau Gon-Boi Loi base areas thru War Zone C and Binh Long Province to Phuoc Binh (YU 1608), where the campaign was to be launched. On 10 May, the 272 Regiment attacked Phuoc Binh subsector. The 273 Regiment, which was to attack the airfield and intercept ARVN reinforcements, did not arrive in the area until 2200 hours on the 9th. On 10 May 1965, as it moved out to perform its mission, the 273 Regiment was hit by tactical air and withdrew into the woods. The regiment reportedly suffered heavy casualties. One platoon in the 1 Battalion is known to have lost all but four men and another company from the 1 Battalion cared for 30 wounded from the 3 Battalion.

A month later, on 9 June, the 272 Regiment attacked Dong Xoai Subsector (YT 0875). In this battle, the 271 and 273 Regiments were deployed to intercept ARVN reinforcements. Although the 272 Regiment suffered heavy casualties and did not take the post, it heralded the battle as a great victory. COSVN awarded the 272 Regiment the title "Glorious Doan Dong Xoai" and a flag inscribed "Determined to Fight and Win." Most of the 273 Regiment never became engaged because the expected ARVN reinforcements were not committed. The 273 Regiment then moved off to the north, where it attacked Bu Dop (XU 9929), on 20 July, after which the regiment was not contacted again until November 1965.

(C) OPERATIONS, NOV 1965 (U)
(Map 5)

After the ZX Campaign, the 273 VC Regiment probably returned to its Bau Gon-Boi Loi bases for rest, replacements and retraining.

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In early November 1965, the 271, 272 and 273 Regiments and the Phu Loi Battalion were reported to be located on both sides of Highway 13 in the vicinity of Bau Ban (XT 7846). Based on this intelligence, the 3 Brigade, 1 US Infantry Division, initiated Operation BUSHMASTER I (10-22 November) in support of 5 ARVN Division operations along Highway 13.

1st Battle of Bau Bang, 12 November 1965

On the night of 11-12 November, 2/2 Infantry Task Force, which was responsible for sweeping and securing Highway 13 between Lai Khe (XT 7840) and Bau Long Pond (XT 7853), occupied a night defensive position just to the south of Bau Bang. At 0605 hours, 12 November, while preparing to conduct its morning road sweep mission, the 2/2 Infantry came under a 10 minute 60mm mortar attack. At 0616 hours, automatic weapons and small arms joined the mortars, and a ground assault began by elements of the 273 and 271 VC Regiments and the Phu Loi Battalion. (The Phu Loi Battalion became the K-3 Battalion, Dong Nai Regiment in December 1967; this in turn became the K-4 Battalion, Dong Nai Regiment, in April 1968.)

The first assault came from the jungle and rubber trees on the west side of the road and to the south of the 2/2 Infantry perimeter. After crawling through waist high peanut bushes under cover of the mortar and automatic weapons fire, the VC unsuccessfully assaulted the wire. This assault was soon followed by one from the west. Again unsuccessful, the main attack was launched at 0700 hours from the north, out of the village of Bau Bang. The assaulting forces were supported by mortars in the village and recoilless rifles dug into the berm running along the village's southern edge. (The assault was halted at the wire, except for one suicide squad that penetrated the perimeter and threw a grenade into the Number 1 Howitzer position, killing two and wounding four of the crew. During these attacks, four flights of tactical aircraft were used against the mortars, recoilless rifles, and infantry staging areas, as well as both direct and indirect artillery fire. Still determined to carry the position, the VC renewed their attack from the village at 0900 hours. During this assault, Battery C, 2/33 Artillery fired 65 rounds directly into the ranks of the oncoming VC, and a fifth flight of aircraft arrived in time to place napalm directly on both the attacking force and the mortar positions in Bau Bang.

The six hours of fighting cost the VC 198 KIA (BC). The number of these losses attributable to the 273 Regiment is not known; however, a subsequently captured document claims the regiment's losses at Bau Bang to have been 30 KIA and 58 WIA.

The 273 and 271 Regiments then withdrew to the Michelin Plantation where they conducted countersweep operations against the 7 ARVN Regiment, 5 ARVN Division, on 22 and 27 November. The 273 suffered heavy losses in the first.
of these contacts, when a portion of the regiment was trapped by the ARVN. The 7 ARVN Regiment likewise suffered heavy casualties.

The 273 and 271 Regiments then withdrew to War Zone C. When the 3 Brigade, 1 US Infantry Division mounted Operation BLOODHOUND/BUSH-MASTER II (28 November - 9 December 1965) in response to the ARVN contacts, their only contact was with the 272 Regiment, which had been rotated in to replace the 273 and 271 Regiments.

(C) OPERATIONS IN WAR ZONE D, JAN - APR 66 (U)

In early 1966, the 273 VC Regiment moved to War Zone D. In mid-February, it was located near Trung Cay (YT 0039) in an area of eastern Binh Duong Province to which it would return again in 1967. A battalion of the 273 Regiment may have participated with the 1 Battalion, 271 Regiment in the latter unit's attack on a position of B-1/28 Infantry, B-1/4 Cavalry and D-1/5 Artillery (XT 8737) on 24 February 1966. US artillery fire was particularly effective in this action. The fighting lasted for five hours (0140 - 0530) during which time women and children were seen evacuating VC casualties. A main attack never was launched. There were 142 VC KIA (BC) and 15 PWS, with another 250 KIA estimated. The VC lost 11 crew served and 62 individual weapons. Although only the 271 Regiment was identified, later documents, which appear to refer to this engagement, state that the 273 Regiment lost 45 KIA and 145 WIA.

The 273 Regiment remained in War Zone D until late April 1966, when it was ordered back to War Zone C to assist in countering offensive operations by the 1 US Infantry Division. Although the 273 Regiment arrived too late to participate, it remained in War Zone C for the Binh Long Campaign.

(C) MONSOON (AKA BINH LONG) CAMPAIGN, MAY - JUL 1966 (U)

(Map 4)

The 9 VC Division planned to initiate operations during the monsoon season of 1966 with a four-regiment attack on Allied installations in the Loc Ninh (XU 7308) area of Binh Long Province. In addition to its three organic VC regiments, the 9 VC Division was reinforced by the 101 NVA Regiment, which had been operating in Phuoc Long Province and Binh Long Province since its arrival in South Vietnam in February 1965. The mission of the 272 VC Regiment was to seize the Loc Ninh Subsector (XU 6910), while the 101 NVA Regiment seized the Loc Ninh Special Forces Camp (XU 7006). The 271 Regiment was to attack Tich Tien Subsector (XU 7705), and then assist the 272 Regiment (XT 7898) in establishing blocking positions to ambush Allied reinforcements from the south. The units were to move to their attack positions on the nights of 6 through 8 May 1966. However, there was the usual slippage in meeting planned target dates and there was no significant contact until 17 May when an
ARVN Mike Force contacted a VC battalion (XU 5804). Reinforcing the Mike Force, the 2 Battalion, 9 ARVN Regiment also contacted a battalion. One or both of the VC battalions were from the 273 Regiment. Both sides suffered heavy losses. By 19 May, the 3 Brigade, 1 US Infantry Division, responding to knowledge of the 9 VC Division plans, moved into Loc Ninh airstrip (XU 7308) and initiated Operation EL PASO I, which preempted the planned attacks.

As the Monsoon Campaign continued, the 1 US Infantry Division increased its operations in Binh Long Province and adjacent areas of Phuoc Long Province with Operation EL PASO II/III. The only significant enemy initiated contacts were planned ambushes of elements of the 1/4 Cavalry by the 272 Regiment on Highway 13 (XT 7676) on 8 June, on the Minh Thanh Road (XT 7075) on 9 July, and by the 271 Regiment on Highway 13 (XU 7203) on 30 June. In these actions, the 271 Regiment lost 270 KIA, and the 272 Regiment lost 332 KIA. The 273 Regiment was contacted twice in significant actions, first on 11 June and later on 2 July 1966.

Battle of Loc Ninh Rubber Plantation, 11 June 1966

On 11 June, 2/28 Infantry Battalion and CIDG forces engaged the 1 Battalion, 273 Regiment in a nine hour battle in the Loc Ninh Rubber Plantation. Contact was initiated at 0735 hours when two platoons from US A-2/28 Infantry moving to blocking positions in support of planned operations at Village Number 10 (XU 710 100), began sustaining small arms fire from a VC platoon (XU 715 093). At 0810 hours, small arms fire was sustained from another VC platoon dug in 200 meters to the north of Hill 150 (XU 715 095). A third platoon of A Company and a CIDG platoon, delayed two hours from planned heliborne landings by morning fog, touched down in a landing zone (XU 702 112) at 0835 hours, following a five minute gunship preparation. A Company and the CIDG managed to surround Hill 150, but were unable to penetrate the well-entrenched VC position. C Company reinforced and, linking up with A Company at 1030 hours, spotted an additional VC company moving northeast toward Hill 177 (XU 721 111).

C Company was ordered to intercept and attack this force and was reinforced by the Reconnaissance Platoon. At 1425 hours, following an artillery preparation, C Company and the Reconnaissance Platoon assaulted Hill 177. The VC concentrated their fire on the Reconnaissance Platoon and the adjoining left flank platoon of C Company, and then counterattacked the Reconnaissance Platoon's left flank. Despite fierce fighting, reinforcements by C Company's reserve platoon carried the objective, driving the VC off Hill 177 into the US artillery fire to the north and northwest. The fighting on Hill 177 was over by 1615 hours.

Meanwhile, following several unsuccessful assaults by A Company on Hill 150, B Company (the battalion reserve) and a CIDG company had reinforced by 1500
hours. At 1630 hours, following an artillery preparation, B Company assaulted the hill, completely overrunning the VC positions. Fleeing to the south, these VC ran into the heavy fire from the CIDG blocking positions, causing the VC to scatter to the southwest in complete disorganization. The 1 Battalion, 273 Regiment lost 98 KIA (BC) and one PW in these actions, with an additional 150 men estimated as killed; two days later another 273 Regiment soldier rallied at Loc Ninh.

Delaying Action, 2 July 1966

On 30 June, the 271 Regiment had met disaster in its abortive regimental ambush of the US 1/4 Cavalry Squadron on Route 13 between An Loc and Loc Ninh. Losing 270 KIA (BC) and nine PWs, the 271 began to retreat westward to its base camp at Sroc Gon Trang (XT 5785). Pursued by the US 2/18 Infantry Battalion, the 271 lost 23 more KIA (BC) and two additional PWs. (The 273 VC Regiment apparently then was given the mission of saving the 271 Regiment from further damage.) At 0550 hours on 2 July, its 3 Battalion engaged the pursuing 2/18 Infantry with small arms and mortars (XU 607 018). The 3 Battalion assaulted three times in unsuccessful attempts to close. The US 1/28 Infantry Battalion reinforced the 2/18 Infantry and unsuccessfully tried to flank the VC. Contact broke at 0910 hours, and the 3 Battalion, 273 Regiment withdrew toward Cambodia, leaving behind 46 KIA (BC).

Estimates place the 273 Regiment's losses during the Monsoon Campaign at 40 percent of its personnel and numerous weapons. From the Loc Ninh area, the 273 Regiment probably returned to War Zone C. After receiving replacements from Local Force units of Western Nambo (VC MR 111), it moved back to its old Bau Gon-Boi Loi base areas. The 273 Regiment also may have begun to receive NVA replacements during this period in 1966. NVA PWs had been captured in the 30 June actions with the 271 Regiment, and in August there were 400 NVA replacements at a COSVN replacement center in Tay Ninh Province awaiting assignment.

This campaign resulted in the 273 Regiment being awarded the title: Loc Ninh Regiment.

(C) INDEPENDENT OPERATIONS, AUG 1966 - SEP 1967 (U)

Sometime between August and November 1966, the 273 VC Regiment was detached from the 9 VC Division and subordinated directly to COSVN. The 273 Regiment was replaced temporarily by the 101 NVA Regiment, which had figured in the abortive May plans for Loc Ninh. The 101 NVA Regiment, which had become subordinated to the 9 VC Division in June, was contacted during both EL PASO (August) and ATTLEBORO (November) and remained with the 9 VC Division until January 1967.
The 1 and 2 Battalions, 273 VC Regiment and the C95 Reconnaissance Company, 9 VC Division were identified in the northern Crescent (XT 4154) during heavy fighting on 4 November with the 1 and 2 Battalions, 27 Infantry, 25 US Infantry Division. These contacts initiated Operation ATTLEBORO. Enemy casualties in that action were 117 KIA (BC). On 15 November, a large base camp in the same area was discovered and destroyed. The 273 Regiment was not identified in other contacts during ATTLEBORO, although identification was made of each of the other three regiments of the 9 VC Division (271, 272 and 101). It is possible that the regiment headquarters and 3 Battalion already had preceded the remainder of the 271 Regiment to the quadri-border area of Binh Duong, Bien Hoa, Binh Long and Long Khanh Provinces. A prisoner, Nguyen Van Do, who was the executive officer of the 2 Battalion, 273 Regiment, claims to have joined the regiment on 23 October 1966 in a base camp (YT 041 282) northeast of Tan Uyen. This is the same area in which regiment headquarters is known to have been located in late January and again in late February 1967. All reported locations of 273 Regiment during January to mid-March 1967 were in northern Bien Hoa Province and eastern Binh Duong Province between Tan Uyen (XT 9723) and Phuoc Vinh (XT 9648). Do claimed that between October 1966 and January 1967, the 2 Battalion, 273 Regiment continued to alternate among four base camps in this area and southern Binh Long Province. The regiment's mission appears to have been to block Allied operations against War Zone D. Its first and largest action was the attack at Bau Bang on 20 March 1967.

2d Battle of Bau Bang, 20 March 1967

The 273 VC Regiment was directed to destroy the 3/5 Cavalry Squadron, located one kilometer north of Bau Bang (XT 788 458). The attack began about midnight with the 3 Battalion attacking from the northwest, the 2 Battalion from the southeast, and the 1 Battalion in reserve, one kilometer to the east. The mission failed, although the regiment headquarters officially described the action as a victory. The regiment lost 277 KIA, including the commander of the 2 Battalion, Chin Kien, and his political officer, Chin Ri. After the battle the regiment withdrew to its Soui Be Base (YT 0750 - YT 0755), where it was resupplied and received replacements.

It was in April 1967 that the 273 Regiment probably returned to the control of the 9 VC Division. However, it continued independent operations until October. In mid-April the regiment was located in the Long Nguyen Secret Zone (vic XT 7153 and XT 6558). About 9 May, the 273 Regiment moved southeast enroute to the Bien Hoa area. During the march, the 2 Battalion and C23 Medical Company were hit on 11 May by B52 strikes while "south of Song Be Base Camp" (YT 0339). The 2 Battalion suffered 20 KIA and 70 seriously wounded. Almost everyone had minor injuries and some vomited blood for the next month. The base camp was destroyed and not rebuilt. On 12 May, elements of the 273 conducted a rocket and mortar attack on Bien Hoa airbase, losing three KIA to
Allied response. The regiment remained in the area until late May, when it displaced 30 kilometers northwest (XT 8443). From there it moved east, crossing the Song Be (YT 0940) and arriving at a base camp (YT 1637) near the Suoi Ba Hao in mid June. There the 273 Regiment rested and underwent political indoctrination.

In early July, the 273 Regiment moved further east (YT 2437) to receive supplies. It then moved to positions (YT 0131) north of Tan Uyen, from which it attacked Tan Uyen (XT 9624) on 27 July and Phu Loi (XT 8314) on 29 July. The regiment then withdrew to War Zone D, where it continued to move among a number of base camps, receiving supplies and replacements and conducting training until early October 1967.

(C) WINTER-SPRING CAMPAIGN, 1967-68 (U)
(Maps 3, 4, 6)

The Winter-Spring Campaign of 1967-68 is believed to have been initiated on 29 October 1967 with the multi-regimental attack in the Loc Ninh area. Unsuccessful in holding objectives in that area, the VC/NVA effort shifted further to the northeast in early December, when attacks were made against Bu Dop and Bo Duc. After Loc Ninh, cadre of the 9 VC Division already had been briefed on the broad outlines of the Tet Offensive 1968. It is possible that one of the enemy's prime goals in these opening phases in the border areas near Cambodia was to draw Allied forces away from the populated areas prior to Tet. US plans adopted in early December, in fact, did envisage a border strategy to block infiltration routes for a post-tet offensive and to destroy enemy forces in the border regions. Operations YELLOWSTONE in War Zone C, SAN ANGELO in Phuoc Long Province and FARGO in Binh Long Province were the results. However, mounting intelligence indicators of a planned VC offensive in the populated areas led to significant modifications of these plans, so this COSVN strategy was not successful. Another objective of the relatively light attacks at Bu Dop and Bo Duc probably was to shake down the units which had received large numbers of green NVA replacements after the losses at Loc Ninh.

Battle of Loc Ninh, 29 October - 3 November 1967 (Map 4)

In early October the 273 VC Regiment left its Soui Lach Be base camp (Map 5) to begin the march to Loc Ninh, where it was to participate in coordinated attacks with the 272 Regiment and the 7 NVA Division's 141 and 165 NVA Regiments. The regimental staff, battalion commanders, K21 Reconnaissance Company and the Commo-Liaison Section preceded the battalions by 20 days. The Commo-Liaison Section returned to act as guides and the battalions moved north at two day intervals to an existing base camp near the Cheri Meang Stream in Cambodia (XU 922 312). Arriving there on 23 October, the regiment rested five
days, studying the attack plan. The 2 Battalion Political Officer stated the purpose of the attacks was to bolster the low morale of the local VC.

The 9 VC Division Headquarters, 272 VC Regiment and 84A NVA Artillery Regiment had arrived in northern Binh Long Province in late September, and the C96 Engineer Company, 9 VC Division had constructed a hospital on the Song Be River. However, the first attack of the six-day offensive was made by the 273 Regiment.

The 273 Regiment moved from Cambodia into Vietnam on 28 October. Moving south, they twice crossed Highway 13 before arriving in their staging area at 2100 hours. Their objective was the Loc Ninh Subsector (XU 733 088) the same target as the abortive attack of May 1965. At 0115 hours on Sunday, 29 October, supporting artillery (82 and 120mm mortar) and RPG fire opened on the subsector. The nearby Loc Ninh Special Forces Camp and Sector Headquarters at Hon Quan also received attacks by fire. At 0200 hours, the 273 Regiment assaulted the subsector, the 2 Battalion attacking from the north and northeast and the 3 Battalion from the southeast. At the same time, the Special Forces compound was attacked, probably by the 1 Battalion. The northern half of the subsector compound was penetrated, but the command bunker and southern portions of the compound held. Although some elements withdrew at 0400 hours, other VC forces remained in the northern part.

At 0715 hours a relief force of the 327 and 329 CIDG Companies moved out of the Special Forces Camp, where fighting had died out at 0530 hours without penetration of the perimeter. At 0800 hours, the CIDG was joined by the 5 ARVN Division's Reconnaissance Company and G2 Recondo Company, which had been helicoptered in from Phu Loi. They were soon followed by two companies of the US 2/28 Infantry and two 105mm howitzer batteries of the 1 US Infantry Division. The ARVN 2/9 Infantry began arriving at 1100 hours. By 1130 hours, 29 October, the subsector headquarters was secured.

The 273 Regiment withdrew to the northwest and established positions to block expected US reinforcements from what the VC estimated to be a natural landing zone at XU 715 185. During sweeps to the west of Loc Ninh on 29 and 30 October, US 1/18 Infantry and CIDG forces made several contacts with probable elements of the 273 Regiment. On the night of 30 October, the 273 Regiment returned to its Cambodian base using the same route by which it had approached Loc Ninh. The number of enemy killed, probably attributable to the 273 Regiment, on 29-30 October, totaled 245.

The 272 Regiment and elements of the 165 and 141 Regiments continued offensive action in the Loc Ninh area through the night of 2-3 November. Known enemy losses through the completion of Allied sweep operations on 8 November were 852 KIA.

CONFIDENTIAL
Battle of Bo Duc/Bu Dop, 29 Nov - 8 Dec 1967 (Map 3)

On 29 November, the 272 VC Regiment and, on 4 December, the 271 VC Regiment were identified in attacks on Bo Duc (XU 9625). A PW from the 273 VC Regiment claims that the 272 Regiment was to attack Bo Duc Subsector, and that two nights later the 271 and 273 were to attack US reinforcements at the Bu Dop airstrip. On 4 December, the 271 Regiment, approaching the airstrip from the southeast, and the 273 Regiment approaching from the northwest, were hit by heavy artillery barrages. They soon withdrew when they realized that there were no Allied troop concentrations in the immediate area. The 2 Battalion, 273 Regiment lost 29 KIA, 55 WIA, and 12 MIA from the artillery fire.

In the early morning hours of 8 December, the 273 VC Regiment renewed the fighting with a mortar attack, followed by a ground assault, against a US 1/2 Infantry position three kilometers southeast of Bo Duc. During the ground assault, 82mm mortars also were fired at 2/8 ARVN Battalion positions south of Bo Duc and mortars and small arms were fired at Bo Duc and the area north of the airstrip. At dawn, six 122mm rockets were fired at the US 1/28 Infantry, probably by the 84A Artillery Regiment. Unsuccessful, the 273 Regiment lost 56 KIA and six PWs. The PWs represented all three battalions of the regiment.

From Bo Duc, the 273 Regiment again returned to its nearby Cambodian sanctuary.

(C) TET OFFENSIVE 31 JAN - 18 FEB 1968 (U) (Map 6)

While in Cambodian base camps during the period between Loc Ninh and Bo Duc, nine division officers in the rank of Battalion Executive Officer and above attended a two day orientation on the upcoming Tet Offensive conducted by Sau Thuong, Chief of the division political section. On the first day, the US and GVN internal political situations were discussed and the plan was outlined. Sau Thuong said that President Johnson had serious problems facing him before the US elections and that large scale VC attacks would weaken his position. Since the GVN expected attacks after Tet, the attacks would be launched during Tet. The offensive would win widespread support among the people and would topple the GVN. If Saigon could be taken, the war would be over.

Sau Thuong stated that the mission had come from the Lao Dong Central Committee. The plan was outlined only in the broadest terms, although the regimental commander reportedly received detailed plans at this time. The 271 and 272 Regiments were to attack positions within Saigon, while the 273 Regiment prevented Allied reinforcement. The second day of the orientation
was devoted to discussion and question and answer sessions. At no time were subsequent offensive phases mentioned.

After the losses at Loc Ninh and Bo Duc, the 273 Regiment reportedly received 100 NVA replacements on each of three approximate dates: 15 November, 20 December, and 26 January. Some elements of the regiment may have moved to the Binh My base Camp (Map 5) in late December. Other elements apparently remained in the Bo Duc area until late January. However, Binh My is the base from which the regiment departed on 31 January 1968 to commence its role in Tet.

The grand scheme for the COSVN offensive in the Saigon area was as follows: Ten battalions of Subregions 1, 2, 3 and 6 to attack into the city to: seize and hold Tan Son Nhut Airbase, the Presidential Palace, and possibly the Vice Presidential Palace; seize the US and Philippine Embassies; and, seize and hold or destroy selected objectives such as National Police stations, power stations, and other GVN installations. The purpose was to disrupt the GVN and the city. The populace was expected to rise up and join the Communist forces, and reinforcements were to follow within 48 hours. Neither of these events occurred. The 5 VC Division (274 and 275 Regiments) was to seize and hold the Long Binh - Bien Hoa complex. The 7 NVA Division (165, 141, and 88 Regiments) was to interdict Highway 13 and to contain the 1 US Infantry Division at Lai Khe. The 101 NVA Regiment was to secure the Go Vap area to the north of Saigon, and other subregional and local forces were to attack outlying targets: Phu Loi, Phu Cuong, Cu Chi, Duc Hoa, Tan An, Ben Tre, My Tho, Ba Ria and Xuan Loc.

Missions of the 9 VC Division were as follows: the 271 Regiment was to attack targets in the Hoc Mon area to include the Quang Trung Training Center (XT 779 999) interdict Route 1 to block Allied reinforcements, and be prepared to reinforce and exploit success in the northern Saigon area. The 272 Regiment was to block the 25 US Infantry Division from the Cu Chi and Dau Tieng areas, and be prepared to reinforce to the northwest of Saigon. As pertains to the 273 Regiment: 1 Battalion was to take and hold Thu Duc District Headquarters (XS 922 995) and prevent movement of Allied forces from Bien Hoa; 2 Battalion was to attack the 2 VNMC Battalion in Thu Duc, seize the junction of Highways 1 and 13 (XS 878 970), provide security for the C19 Engineer Company while it destroyed the Binh Loi Bridge (XS 873 969) and then reinforce the 3 Battalion; 3 Battalion was to block Allied reaction forces from Di An.

The 273 Regiment apparently was late in starting its move. The offensive began at 0300 hours, 31 January, at which time the 273 Regiment was still north of Phu Loi.

On the night of 31 January - 1 February, a 1 US Infantry Division LRRP team north of Phu Loi spotted VC moving south and called artillery in on
them. Alerted by the events of the night, elements of the 1/4 Cavalry and 1/28 Infantry, 1 US Infantry Division conducted sweeps north of Phu Loi next morning. Contact was made with what probably was at least elements of the 273 Regiment Headquarters and 2 Battalion. A PW, who at the time was the regimental Assistant Artillery Officer, mentions receiving "mortar" fire, probably the fire called in by the LRRP team. His march unit took refuge in a deserted village and in the morning moved to another village. During the latter move they were attacked by US tanks and APCs, losing nearly 100 men. Another PW, the Executive Officer of the 2 Battalion, says that due to poor judgement by the 2 Battalion's guide the battalion found itself at daylight on 2 February (probably on 1 February) in a cleared area near Phu Loi airfield, and thus was forced to take refuge in An My Village (XT 840 180), where they hoped to hide until dark. However, they too were attacked by US forces. The US 1 Division cordoned An My, and the action continued through 4 February resulting in 343 enemy KIA.

Finally, at 0400 hours on 2 February, the 1 Battalion, 273 Regiment, launched its attack on Thu Duc District Headquarters and the National Police Station two nights after the opening of the offensive. Having gained intelligence that the VC planned attacks in Thu Duc, the 1/18 Infantry, 1 US Infantry Division, reinforced with tanks, had already deployed there. The 11 Armored Cavalry Regiment and Vietnamese Marines also responded. The attacks were repulsed. The next night, with more troops finally on the scene, the 273 Regiment attacked again in greater strength. At 0100 hours, the Newport Bridge (X5 893 939) was attacked. The VC overran the eastern end of the bridge, but were repulsed at 0250 hours by elements of the 1/5 ARVN Cavalry and the 720 US MP Battalion. Thu Duc District Headquarters was attacked at 0410 hours. The 2 Battalion, 273 Regiment attacked the 2 VNMC Battalion compound at 0650 hours. Again repulsed, the 273 Regiment resorted to sporadic sniper fire on the district headquarters on 4 February. Total enemy losses in the Thu Duc area on 2-3 February were 108 KIA (BC).

Several scattered contacts with the 273 Regiment continued in the area west and northwest of Thu Duc through 27 February. The largest of these contacts was made on 13 February by cavalry elements of the 5 ARVN Division with the C22 Transportation Company, C23 Medical Company, and C26 Training Company of 273 Regiment, which were dug into positions (XT 870 113) four kilometers south of Phu Loi. These companies lost 80 KIA and 11 PW. The group included some personnel rejoining the regiment from the K-29 hospital. The prisoners said the rest of the regiment was further south along the Saigon River (XT 8603). Confirmed losses to the 273 Regiment in the other contacts during this period were 72 KIA and 12 PW although a rallier states that the 2 Battalion, while engaged with Regional Forces (XT 853 150) on 27 February, lost about 100 KIA and over 400 WIA from day long artillery and air strikes.
II Field Force estimated that the 273 Regiment lost 470 persons - almost one-third of the regiment during Tet (pre-Tet strength: 1,450, post-Tet strength: 980).

From the Saigon area, the 273 Regiment withdrew in late February or early March to the Long Nguyen Secret Zone (XT 6060). Occupying one of its traditional base camps, the regiment began receiving supplies and replacements from the Fishhook (MACV Base Area 352). It generally avoided contact, although the 25 US Infantry Division engaged small elements north of the Michelin Plantation (XT 5460 - XT 5959) on five occasions between 14-21 April. The 273 Regiment is known to have received replacements from three infiltration groups (246, 247, 274) during this period. Documents show that the 12 Company, 3 Battalion, had an assigned strength of 94 in March as compared to 27 following Tet.

(C) MAY OFFENSIVE, 1968 (U)  
(Map 7)

During the last ten days in April, the 273 VC Regiment began to move south for the May Offensive against Saigon. Moving south along the eastern edge of the Michelin Plantation, it then moved southwest across the Trapezoid (part of MACV Base Area 356) to Thanh An Village (XT 5438), where it crossed the Saigon River to join the 271 Regiment in the Boi Loi Woods. On the night of 1-2 May, the 273 Regiment preceded the 271 Regiment south through the Citadel, crossed Highway I east of Trang Bang, and crossed the Hau Nghia swamp from the vicinity of Thai My Hamlet (XT 5315). On 2 May, following a light contact made by the 3/10 Cavalry, 25 ARVN Division, with a seven-man group, a sweep of the area uncovered a notebook identifying a reconnaissance element of the 273 Regiment.

On 4 May, the 51 ARVN Ranger Battalion, US 4/23 Infantry and 3/22 Infantry, 25 US Infantry Division, made contact with the 272 Regiment just northeast of Duc Hoa (XS 6397), killing 166 (BC). However, most of the regiment avoided contact and continued on to its staging areas (XS 842 926, 708 863, 745 853) east of the Pineapple (MACV Base Area 372). The entire 9 VC Division would attack Saigon from the west.

During the May Offensive, the 274 Regiment of 5 VC Division plus Dong Nai Regiment and local forces attacked from the east. The 101 NVA Regiment attacked from the north. The Phu Loi Regiment, 506 Battalion, and local forces were identified in the south. Joining the 9 VC Division from the west were the 6, 267 and 269 Battalions of SR-2.

Documents show that the mission of the 273 Regiment was "to block and annihilate Allied forces attempting to enter Saigon." At 0630 hours on the morning of 6 May, the 9 VC Division attacked Saigon with three regiments on line - from north to south the 271, 272 and 273 Regiments. The 273 Regiment
entered Saigon in the vicinity of Phu Thoa Hoa (XS 7991), where it was intercepted by Allied forces. Contact continued until the night of 9-10 May when the regiment withdrew to the southwest, dispersing into the Pineapple (XS 6289) and Tan Nhut (XS 7083) areas. There, supplies and replacements were received from Ba Thu. The 272 Regiment laagered in My Hanh Village (XT 6303) and the 271 Regiment in the Hoc Mon area (XT 7504).

On 14 May, in the Tan Nhut area, the 199 US Light Infantry Brigade found elements of the 273 Regiment (XS 7084), killing 60, and with elements of the 25 US Infantry Division killed another 31 just to the east (XS 7284).

On the night of 26-27 May, the 273 VC Regiment moved back toward Saigon to execute Phase II of the offensive. However, the regiment stumbled into a 25 US Infantry Division night defensive position (XS 7591) and became heavily engaged. Reinforced by the 3/4 Cavalry the next morning, the 25 Division killed 243, virtually destroying the 2 Battalion. The remainder of the regiment lost heart and exfiltrated from the Saigon area. The 273 VC Regiment had lost 881 KIA during May 1968. The 271 and 272 Regiments remained for several more days, but by mid-June the entire division had moved through the Parrot's Beak (MACV Base Area 367) and Angel's Wing (MACV Base Area 760) to Base Area 354 (See Map 8).

Tet and May 1968 had seriously depleted the ranks of the 9 VC Division. It lost large numbers of troops and many experienced cadre. Troop replacement came with major NVA infiltration, many units becoming 80-90 percent NVA, but the quality of leadership could not be replaced. The leadership and experienced gap significantly hindered the return to combat effectiveness.

(C) BATTLES OF TAY NINH, Aug-Sep 1968 (U)
(Map 8)

Despite two failures to achieve its objectives in Saigon, COSVN continued to set its sights on the capital area. However, action now was initiated in Tay Ninh in an apparent effort to draw Allied forces away from Saigon, inflict heavy US casualties, and influence the US elections. Principal targets in August and September were US troops, fire support bases and base camps. COSVN called for the annihilation of the US 25 Infantry Division. Tay Ninh City itself also was targeted. As the fourth largest city in South Vietnam, provincial capital, and symbolic center of the Cao Dai religion, temporary control of Tay Ninh would have great psychological and political impact. COSVN deployed eight Main Force regiments and two provincial battalions in Tay Ninh during the period 17 August - 27 September 1968. The most intense action occurred during two distinct phases: 17-27 August and 11-27 September.

The 273 VC Regiment opened the battle with an attack on the 3/22 Infantry at Fire Support Base Buell II (XT 227568). The regiment recently had been identified in a move south from the Katum area to the vicinity of Bau Co. On
the night of 17 August, the US 2/27 Infantry identified a column of 300 troops moving towards Tay Ninh City from the east (XT 294520). This force (3 Battalion, 275 Regiment) was broken up and repulsed and the clash served to increase the alertness of forces around Tay Ninh, who had been expecting enemy offensive action for some weeks.

At 0115 hours, 18 August, Headquarters 1 Brigade, 25 US Infantry Division at Tay Ninh West Base Camp (XT 165517) was hit by 82mm and 107mm rocket fire. Eight minutes later Fire Support Base Buell II was reported under heavy 82mm mortar attack. Immediately following a 100 round preparation, the 2 and 3 Battalions, 273 Regiment charged the fire base in human wave attacks. Their mission was to destroy the fire support base. During the next three hours, the 3/22 Infantry, supported by two artillery batteries within the base firing "Killer Junior" (direct time fire), additional artillery from Fire Support Bases Rawlins and St Barbara, light fire teams and tactical air strikes, repulsed the desperate efforts of the 273 Regiment. Contact was broken at 0430 hours as the regiment withdrew to the northeast. They had lost 105 KIA (BC), 13 prisoners and one rallier at a US cost of 1 KIA and 26 WIA.

The attack on Buell was only the opening round. There were widespread attacks to the west of Tay Ninh City and into the "Rabbit Ears" along the southern and southeastern approaches to the city by 0245 hours. The enemy was not completely expelled from the Long Hoa area (XT 2447) until the following night. For the next three days there were repeated contacts in the Cau Khoi Rubber Plantation (XT 3247) with the 275 VC Regiment and in the Ben Cui Rubber Plantation (XT 3247) with the 33 NVA Regiment, both of the 5 VC Division.

From Buell, the 273 VC Regiment moved off to the northwest of Tay Ninh City. In the early morning hours of 20 August its 3 Battalion moved to attack Tay Ninh Base Camp from that direction. However, at 0105 hours, it stumbled on an outpost of the 3 Platoon, A Company, US 2/27 Infantry two kilometers northwest (XT 146543) of the base camp. Despite repeated attempts to overrun the 36 men in this hardspot, the 3 Battalion was forced to withdraw at dawn. Artillery, helicopter gunships, and tactical airstrikes supported the 3 Platoon, and the 273 Regiment left behind 155 KIA, 3 prisoners and weapons including 5 machine guns.

Buell was attacked again two nights later (0105 hours, 22 August), but this time by the 174 Regiment, 5 VC Division as the battle was over for the 273 VC Regiment on 20 August. In September, its role was assumed by the 271 and 272 Regiments. These units had begun slow movement south along the Cambodian border during the August phase. Their mission was to be prepared to strike
Saigon, if the route through southern Hau Nghia Province was opened by drawing Allied forces to Tay Ninh. When it became apparent that these tactics had failed, the 271 and 272 Regiments were recalled. On the night of 10-11 September, the 271 took its turn at unsuccessfully assaulting Fire Support Base Buell II, followed two nights later by the 272 Regiment. The US 3/22 Infantry had faced and defeated the all-out efforts of four enemy regiments.

The 273 Regiment withdrew in August to War Zone C minus at least 276 personnel. It continued to avoid contact in September and October.

Total VC/NVA losses during the 42 days of fighting in Tay Ninh during August and September had been 2489 KIA, 70 prisoners, 7 Hoi Chanhs and 445 individual and 241 crew served weapons.

(C) WINTER-SPRING CAMPAIGN 1968 - 69 (U) (Map 8)

From August 1968 until April 1969, when it began its redeployment to the Delta, the 273 VC Regiment was relatively inactive. It remained most of the time at bases in Cambodia or in the "Elephants Ear" area adjacent to Cambodia (MACV Base Area 354). Several recent prisoners mentioned the Cau Duong or Ben Thap areas of Cambodia as major permanent bases (apparently WT 94679562 southwest of Xom Giua).

In November 1968, although still seeking to avoid contact, the regiment was engaged three times in northwestern War Zone C by the 1/7 Cavalry, 1 US Cavalry Division and once by the ARVN Marines. On 16 November, the 3 Battalion lost 36 KIA to the 1/7 Cavalry, 1 US Cavalry Division (XT 1089) while just to the southwest (XT 0684), the ARVN Marines contacted the 2 Battalion. On 22 November, the 1/7 Cavalry killed 6 and captured 1 prisoner (XT 0278) and three days later initiated the largest engagement, in which the 273 Regiment lost 138 KIA and 6 prisoners (XT 0379). The 273 Regiment was not contacted again until 14 January, when the 1 ARVN Airborne Battalion engaged an platoon just east (XT 0765) of Base Area 354, killing 12 and capturing documents identifying the 273 Regiment. Twenty kilometers south (XT 0746), near Ben Loi on 28 January, the 6 ARVN Airborne Battalion engaged an unknown size force killed 27, and captured 3 prisoners from the 273 Regiment. The only other contact was also in the Ben Loi area (XT 0847), where the 8 and 9 ARVN Airborne Battalions on 9-10 March were in heavy contact with the 1 Battalion, 273 Regiment, which lost 74 KIA and 3 prisoners.

Actually, the entire 9 VC Division was frustrated in its plans for the Winter-Spring Campaign, although the 271 Regiment was active against battalions of the 1 ARVN Airborne Division southwest of Tay Ninh City and the 272 Regiment repeatedly threw itself against 25 US Infantry Division patrol bases (Mole City, Diamond I, II and III) off the Angel's Wing (MACV Base Area 706).
The campaign was initiated in III CTZ by an ineffective "high point" on the night of 12-13 December. The 9 VC Division did not initially participate. Not until 10 days later, on the night of 22-23 December, did the division make its contribution by hitting Patrol Base Mole City (XT 248310) with the 272 Regiment and the D14 Battalion of Tay Ninh Province, losing 105 KIA. The only significant 9 VC Division action when the general offensive phase began two months later on 22-23 February, was again the 272 Regiment's; this time hitting Patrol Base Diamond 1 (XT 338188) and losing 127 KIA.

There is no doubt that the planned mission of the 9 VC Division was again to go to Saigon. During January, February, and March 1969, reconnaissance parties from each of the regiments and the division's T28 Reconnaissance Battalion repeatedly were discovered and eliminated along traditional routes crossing southern Hau Nghia Province. In all, eleven groups were intercepted, three of them from the 273 Regiment. The 272 Regiment and T28 Reconnaissance Battalion were to spearhead the 9 VC Division into Saigon in the vicinity of Ba Queo (XS 7894) probably in conjunction with SR-2 battalions, during the general offensive. The 271 Regiment appears to have been scheduled to follow the 272 Regiment. A reconnaissance party for the 1 and 2 Battalions, 273 Regiment, was scouting a route from Ba Thu to My Thanh Dong (XT 0243) on 20 January and another party, captured on 7 February, was to conduct reconnaissance of the Hoc Mon (XT 7504) area, which probably was the division's objective. The preemptive campaign of the 25 US Infantry Division and 1 US Cavalry Division prevented the 9 VC Division from moving any forces larger than reconnaissance parties into Hau Nghia Province from Cambodia.

(C) RETURN TO THE DELTA, MAR - MAY 1969 (U)
(Map 9)

After the Ben Soi Contact on 9-10 March 1969, the 273 VC Regiment was unlocated until early May. On 26 March, there had been a contact with the CIDG near the Angel's Wing (XT 344214), in which a prisoner was captured who said he was from the C22 Transportation Company, 273 Regiment. However, no identification of maneuver units was made, and it appears that if he were a member of the 273 Regiment, his unit was then supporting the 272 Regiment.

On 8 May, a rallier claimed to be a company executive officer in the 3 Battalion, 273 Regiment, which he stated was located in the Parrot's Beak (XS 286956). He further stated that the regiment would coordinate with the 1 NVA Regiment to attack Saigon through SR-3 on or about 20 July. Since the Parrot's Beak location correlated with information given the same day by a rallier from the 100 Rear Service Group who said the 273 Regiment had moved south, several agent reports and the tenuous 26 March identification of C22, the rallier's story was accepted. However, in hindsight, it now appears that he was a deception agent (probably witting), whose purpose was to present
a false target for the 273 should its southward movement been discovered. In reality, the move to MR-2 already was well underway. He should have known the plans in March and the date of his rally coincides with the movement south out of Cambodia into MR-2.

To reinforce the 273 Regiment for independent operations in the Delta, the 10 Artillery Battalion was organized probably prior to March 1969. Armed with 60mm, 82mm and 120mm mortars, 12.8mm antiaircraft machineguns and RPGs, the 10 Battalion also received ten days sapper training (25 April-5 May 1969) while in Cambodia enroute to MR-2. It also may have been equipped with 107mm rockets because the first significant employment of rockets in the GVN IV CTZ coincided with the 273 Regiment's first action there in May 1969.

The advance party for the 273 Regiment, according to a prisoner, departed on the march to MR-2 on 2 March 1969. The party consisted of 42 persons and assumed the cover designation that the regiment was to use during the movement: Transportation Group 69, MR-2. Upon arriving on the east bank of the Mekong River (WT 2270) in early May, the party spent six days negotiating with Cambodian officials before it was allowed to cross. Once across, they moved to Phuom Den Mountain (VS 9070), arriving there on 1 May. When the last battalion (10 Artillery Battalion) closed into the Nui Dai area (VS 9257) on 10 May, the advance party personnel returned to their parent units.

The main body of the 273 Regiment began its departure from Base Area 354 the latter half of April 1969. The route probably followed the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border, passing through the Angel’s Wing and the Parrot’s Beak (Map 8), Tan Leo (WJ 6514) and the Mekong River area along the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border (WT 247055). It was probably at this last location that the 10 Artillery Battalion received its sapper training. Documents indicate that at least one battle was fought with Cambodian forces enroute; the 2 Battalion lost 127 killed and one missing in the contact. In late May, the Battalion also lost six killed, four wounded, and five missing from artillery and air strikes while moving along the border. The 10 Artillery Battalion also skirmished with Cambodian forces while crossing the Vinh Te Canal (point unknown) to enter MR-2 on the night of 10-11 May. The main body of the regiment probably completed closing into the Seven Mountains area (MACV Base Area 400) during the period 9-11 May, although rear elements, to include convalescents, were still arriving as late as 17 August.

The regiment arrived none too soon, and probably arrived later than directed by COSVN. At least, unlike Tet 1968, it did arrive in time to participate in the country-wide “high-point” on the night of 11-12 May which initiated the Summer Campaign of 1969.
of the 273 Regiment, three individual weapons were captured. The same day Vietnamese Marines contacted a possible element of the 273 Regiment in the northern portion of the U Minh Forest and Base Area 483.

The following day, 7 October, Vietnamese Marines engaged a company sized enemy force in northern Base Area 483 (VR 979642). Sixteen enemy were killed and one individual weapon was captured in an area where prisoners and ralliers stated that the 273 Regiment was undergoing refitting and retraining.

While searching the caves of Nui Hon Me in the Three Sister's area (VS 881 179) on 11 October, ARVN Infantry contacted an unknown sized enemy force. In addition to killing 12 enemy, eight individual and two crew served weapons were captured. The ARVN possibly engaged elements of the 273 Regiment which reportedly had the mission of protecting commun liaison routes in the area. The same day, in central Base Area 483 (WR 070428), ARVN units contacted elements of the 2 Battalion, killing 10 enemy and capturing three detainees as well as two individual and one crew served weapon.

On 18 October while sweeping the central U Minh Forest (VR 878 449), the 21 ARVN Division contacted probable elements of the 10 Artillery Battalion. The next day ARVN Infantry, supported by US gunships, contacted probable elements of the 273 Regiment, six kilometers to the east of the previous contact (WR 032 461). Results from the two operations included 108 enemy killed and 16 individual weapons, six crew served weapons, 63 grenades, 154 pounds of TNT, and 145 B-40 rockets captured. In support of the identification, a rallier stated that he had seen two battalions from the 273 Regiment training recently in the immediate area (WR 003450).

On 20 October, ARVN Infantry contacted an unknown size enemy force to the east (WR 050508), resulting in 10 more enemy killed and one individual weapon and one crew served weapon captured. The same day Vietnamese Marine Corps elements entered a mined area in the U Minh (VR 941583) and discovered a small weapons cache which contained 32 107mm rockets and 100 rounds of mixed 60mm and 82mm mortar rounds, probably for use by the 273 Regiment. Ten days later, two kilometers to the east (VR 960 570), Vietnamese Marines again engaged possible elements of the 273 Regiment killing 10 enemy.

On 23 October, an assistant platoon leader from the 1 Battalion, 273 VC Regiment, rallied to the 21 ARVN Division. He said that his battalion arrived
in northern Base Area 483 in late August. While the 1 Battalion was in Kien
An District (WR 1390), VC Rach Gia Province in late September, he was sent
to make a reconnaissance of the Cal Rang River (WR 072 995), approximately
17 kilometers southwest of Ca Mau, An Xuyen Province in preparation for the
1 Battalion's move to that area in late October or early November. At the
time he rallied, the 1 Battalion had moved to northwest Base Area 483 (VR 885
756). The 1 Battalion was scheduled to join forces with the U Minh 2 Local
Force Battalion and operate just south of Base Area 483 in the near future.
According to the rallier, the 1 Battalion had a strength of 225, 80 percent
of whom were NVA. He described the unit as being in poor physical condition,
disillusioned and discouraged by harassment from air strikes and patrol boats.
He placed the 273 Regimental Headquarters in northeastern Base Area 483
(WR 214 677) as early as 20 September. The 1 Battalion was mustering in one

Documents identifying the K-16 Artillery Company were taken from a body
in northeastern Base Area 483 (WR 400 725) on 4 November. Documents from
various 273 Regiment Staff Sections had been captured earlier in Base Area
483. This, plus the presence of several of the maneuver battalions in the
area, confirmed the presence of the 273 Regimental Headquarters in the area.
On the same day, ARVN Rangers contacted possible elements of the 273 Regiment
in central Base Area 483 (WR 032 432), resulting in seven enemy killed,
seven detainees, seven ralliers, 59 refugees from the U Minh Forest and one
individual weapon captured. Rangers continued to operate in the area and the
next day, 3 kilometers to the northwest (WR 012452), they again made contact.
Two enemy were detained, eight persons rallied and 150 civilian refugees re-
turned to GVN control.

The following day, 6 November, the headquarters of the Vietnamese Navy
Amphibious Task Group 211:3, located in north central U Minh Forest (VR
994 620), was attacked at 0220 hours by an estimated two enemy battalions
supported by 82mm mortar fire. Contact was lost at 0600 hours. The 6
Vietnamese Marine Corps Battalion conducted a day long sweep of the area.
While the Vietnamese Marines and Navy suffered moderate losses, they
inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, killing 84, capturing 16 individual and
one crew served weapon and destroying 23 sampans. The attack was probably
conducted by elements of the 273 Regiment.

From 2300 hours, 7 November until 0515 hours, 8 November the Head-
quarters of the Amphibious Task Group (VR 760 540) again came under fire
from mortars, RPGs and enemy ground forces. Successive ground attacks
by an estimated company from the southeast and southwest were accompanied
Elements of the 32 ARVN Infantry engaged possible elements of the 273 VC Regiment west of Tan Phu (WR 1144) on 14 and 15 December. In these two contacts ARVN casualties were nine killed and 20 wounded while the enemy lost 85 killed.

A prisoner captured during a nearby operation (WR 1942) on 15 December identified his unit as the 1 Battalion, 273 VC Regiment. The prisoner revealed that the battalion's 200 men had been split into three company size elements and had been dispersed in his area of capture since 10 December. Low level agent reports indicated that the 1 Battalion possibly was to redeploy to southern An Xuyen Province. Heavy casualties suffered by the enemy as a result of aggressive GVN operations during November may have postponed this redeployment. The battalion's move to the location reported by the prisoner probably was for reorganization and replacement of personnel.

As of 15 December, the bulk of the 273 VC Regiment probably was dispersed throughout the northern U Minh Forest with rear service elements scattered along infiltration routes from the U Minh Forest to the Seven Mountains area, maintaining a line of communication with the 18B NVA Regiment. The heavy casualties suffered by the 273 VC Regiment have greatly reduced their combat effectiveness and necessitated refitting and resupply activities.

(C) TACTICS (U)

The 273 VC Regiment has been employed in many roles. It has acted as a reserve force for the 271 and 272 Regiments and as a security force for the movement of supplies from Cambodia into central War Zone C. It has interdicted Allied lines of communication and harassed ARVN and US forces with attacks by fire and ground assaults. Additionally, it has been given missions to seize and hold GVN population centers, as well as to protect VC/NVA controlled areas.

The 273 VC Regiment generally follows standard tactics employed by most VC units.

When initially organized, the regiment did not engage in sustained action. Battalions fought fairly well but did not stand up for long under increased pressure of extended contacts. Their actions were usually of short duration, probably a result of their origin in the Delta where VC actions usually have been short but violent ambushes particularly along roads and canals.

The regiment initially displayed a weakness in employing its battalions piecemeal without mutual support even when on regimental missions.
The regiment is experienced in conducting assaults upon fixed installations and ambushes and is skilled in preparing and holding defensive positions. Since 1967, most operations conducted by the 273 Regiment have been attacks on fixed installations and towns. A point of special interest is that the 273 Regiment attacks installations which it has hit before. Success in regimental operation has been limited by coordinating problems and by a virtually fanatic determination to continue the attack under adverse conditions. These deficiencies have proven very costly in manpower losses.

One or two battalions may be committed to the assault during a regiment size attack, the other battalions being used in blocking or reserve roles. The number of battalions committed for the assault varies with the amount of fire power needed to secure the objective, the necessity to use blocking forces to engage anticipated reinforcements and the requirements for a reserve.

The 273 VC Regiment prefers hilly areas (few where now located in MR-3) and clear jungle for establishing a base camp. It never billets in local villages. Hilly areas provide observation, and dense jungles have been avoided because B-52s usually bomb these areas. Base camps initially were located close to rivers and streams, but the increase in Allied Air activity since 1965 has forced commanders to relocate base camps to areas where discovery is least likely.

Base camps normally are laid out in a triangular pattern with one battalion on each side of the triangle. Companies normally are about one kilometer apart, and the battalions about three kilometers apart. The regimental command post usually is surrounded by its support companies.

The Reconnaissance Company sends a squad out daily to patrol the area within a three kilometer radius. Each battalion is responsible for the security of its sector, which is also laid out in a triangle manner. A security force of five squads (one from each company) is divided into two elements. One element establishes listening and observation posts approximately 15 to 20 minutes walking distance from the battalion's location, while the second element has the mission of patrolling the battalion perimeter. During the day, half the security force is on duty. At night the security force is on 100 percent alert. The base camp perimeter consists of three man bunkers (2.5m x 1.5m) 10 to 15 meters apart. They are covered with logs and 20 inches of earth. Communications trenches connect all areas but do not run back to the regiment command post area. The inner base camp has squad size bunkers (10 meters by two meters by 1.5 meters) which are covered by logs and one meter of earth.

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The regiment will normally build a new base camp when it moves. Sometimes, however, it will use an old base camp, even moving into a partially destroyed one and rebuilding it. The regiment normally does not move back to a base camp which has been discovered. In the rainy season, the unit usually stays in a base camp for about one month. In the dry season, it moves about every 10 to 15 days. Prior to leaving an area which has served as a base area, personnel destroy huts or bunkers and fill in trenches and foxholes.

The 273 VC Regiment normally marches in the following order: 2 Battalion, 1 Battalion, Regimental Headquarters, and 3 Battalion. Its new artillery battalion may attach its companies to the maneuver battalions. While moving, units always march in a single file. There is no flank security but the troops are trained to encircle any ambush position when they are attacked. A reconnaissance element leads each battalion by 250 meters and is followed by an infantry company. The fire support company and the two other infantry companies follow in order. Companies are separated by 150 meters in daylight and 50 meters at night. The battalion command element is positioned throughout the battalion, and the commanding officer is always with the last company. Battalions march about two hours apart. Although the regiment has marched during the day in jungle areas, almost all movement is at night. Before resting during the day, the unit digs uncovered foxholes. The unit has moved up to 20 kilometers in a day, and 10 to 15 kilometers is normal.

(C) CONCLUSIONS AND FORECAST (U)

By VC/NVA standards, the 273 "Loc Ninh" VC Regiment is a famous unit, boasting many accomplishments. It has participated actively in all of the major campaigns in III CTZ during the past five years. Having been formed from units from IV CTZ, it is a logical unit to have redeployed to the Delta to upgrade the effort there. However, the illusion of a return to its original area of operations is more psychological than operationally significant. Although the regiment still retains some survivors of its original VC and regrouped cadre in leadership positions, it is now composed of at least 80 percent NVA personnel while 90 percent of the personnel in the maneuver battalions probably are NVA.

The regiment has suffered large cumulative casualties since 1964. The Tet and May Campaigns of 1968, in particular, brought irreplaceable losses in leadership and experience; losses during the Winter-Spring Campaign of 1968-69 (to include Post Tet Offensive of 1969 also were heavy). The regiment has continued to suffer significant casualties in the Delta. A recent rallier from the 18B NVA Regiment said that 500 replacements destined for the 18B had been diverted to the 273 VC Regiment, due to the latter's heavy losses. This statement probably is true.
Despite the regiment's frequent tenacity in frontal assaults, its claims of victories, and the honor accorded it by COSVN, the 273 Regiment has never successfully overrun a significant objective. As far back as 1964, having been kept on the run by ARVN forces, the 3 Battalion attacked Duc Hue without removing the muzzle cover from their recoilless rifles. The 273 VC Regiment was late for Tet 1968, failed in its mission in August 1968, did little during the Winter-Spring Campaign of 1968-69 in GVN III CTZ, and narrowly missed being late for the May 1969 highpoint in GVN IV CTZ. The 273 Regiment poses a significant increase in enemy numerical strength in the Delta, but is not a match for the ARVN troops in the area, particularly components of the 21 ARVN Division.

At this writing, captured documents and personnel plus numerous agent reports indicate that elements of two more regiments (88 NVA and 101D NVA) have followed the 273 VC and 18B NVA Regiments to the Delta of GVN IV CTZ. Even with the 273 "VC" Regiment, these are NVA forces.