

REMEMBERING TET

(1967-68 – 149th MI, Hue, South Vietnam)

The city of Hue was completely surrounded by thousands of enemy troops thirsting for the blood of foreign invaders and lusting for revenge against those native Vietnamese who had been assisting the Americans, militarily and domestically. Our intelligence unit, located on the south side of the Perfume River and opposite the old imperial capital, was charged with collecting, assessing, collating, and disseminating all intelligence about any hostile troops within the northernmost province of South Vietnam.

In late spring of 1967, daily ominous reports began to suddenly pour in from our agents in the field from all areas surrounding Hue. These agents were mostly common people from all walks of life: farmers, merchants, housewives, students, missionaries, etc., and they were fairly trustworthy. With the increasingly wide range of sources telling us basically the same thing, we could clearly see that something big, even apocalyptic was about to happen.

A careful analysis of these reports indicated a major enemy troop buildup in all the environs of Hue. The sources gave the precise location and strength of these individual units: multiple battalions had the entire city encircled, each with hundreds of soldiers. The reports indicated what type of weapons each unit possessed: rockets, mortars, artillery, and heavy arms. They also revealed the mission of each unit: to kill every American and every Vietnamese who had worked for, or with, the Americans.

The information coming in seemed to give a complete picture of this dire threat. We knew the Who, the What, the Where, the How, but there was one piece of data that was not forthcoming: the **When**.

Most likely the enemy units did not know this themselves and were simply awaiting a directive from the North.

For over a month the reports continued to pour in and the level of concern about an imminent attack had reached a 'fever pitch'. The unanimous opinion of the intel staff, after viewing the large map on the wall of the 'war room' with the enemy units' location clearly pinpointed, was 'to get outta here – and fast! But where to go? The decision came quickly to relocate our unit's headquarters to the large military installation at Danang, hopefully out of danger's path.

The most disillusioning aspect of these circumstances was the unwillingness of military leaders in Saigon to take the threat seriously. In spite of the high volume of intense reports of impending attack facing the city of Hue, and in spite of our unit's repeated commentaries attempting to alert the U.S. war machine in advance, and thus avert the obvious consequences of an all out invasion, our unit was told to 'shut up' and 'mind its own business!'

And shut up we did. For the next few months we pushed papers, ceased all 'warnings' and commentaries until one by one our staff members rotated out of the country and back to the states. The impending 'threat' appeared to be an empty one. But each member left confident of having done his duty.

The '**When**' was not to be ridiculed nor ignored for long. It emerged as a roaring lion on the eve of Tet, the Vietnamese lunar new year, Jan 30, 1968. Over 100 towns and villages were simultaneously and viciously attacked throughout the country, including the city of Hue. This military offensive spelled disaster for the U.S. effort and changed the entire course of the war. It drastically changed lives on both sides of the Pacific and altered both societies for generations to come. It can be argued that our country has never truly recovered from that debacle of military and economic futility. We have moved on, but we have never truly recovered.

Such arrogance, foolhardiness, and repetitive miscalculations during two decades of tragedy cost the lives of over 3 million people, including 58,000 Americans.

May God rest their souls.



Wikipedia Tet Map: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tet_Offensive

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