

UNCLASSIFIED

# DAILY ENTERPRISE



## (U) HISTORY TODAY - October 29, 2015

FROM: CCH

Run Date(s): 10/29/2015

### (U) A look back at the 1960s: SIGINT and traffic analysis in Vietnam




(U) In October 1967, a senior NSA civilian analyst in Vietnam was assigned to work with analysts of the 330th Radio Research Company, a cover designation for the Army Security Agency (predecessor of INSCOM), in Pleiku.

(U) The civilian analyst, Thomas L. Glenn, described the personnel he met in Pleiku. "Working in a pair of tottering Quonset huts at tables they had made themselves and harassed by wind, dust, and erratic electricity, they saw themselves in league against the forces of evil -- variously embodied in the [Viet Cong], the weather, and NSA. They were sustained by an irreverent humor and a passionate devotion to their work."

(U) In addition to this, Glenn added, "they shared a foreboding of uncertain origins that a major enemy action was in the offing." Specific indicators of impending action were lacking, but the analysts had solid target knowledge and based their suspicions on small anomalies that added up to them.

(U) Glenn worked with the 330's analysts to try to confirm or deny their suspicions. First, the traffic analysts noted some increase in enemy messages, often sent at night, when their transmitters normally were shut down. Some enemy units had been detached from the main unit and had set up operations in what was known as the tri-border area, South Vietnam's Kontum Province, near the borders with Cambodia and Laos.

(U) The senior military analyst in the unit, known as "Pops," "who had more SIGINT experience than all of us combined," was unconvinced. One usual sign of an impending attack was an upsurge in enemy reconnaissance activity against their prospective target. This activity had not been observed to that point.

 (U) Historical photo: traffic analysis at Pleiku.

(U) On October 20, however, the 330th began intercepting communications associated with reconnaissance. In addition to traffic analysis, direction finding indicated the enemy units were converging on the city of Dak To, in western Kontum Province. Some enemy messages expressed fear that their movements had been discovered.

(U) The final piece of the mosaic was collection on October 26. An enemy message revealed that they were to adopt a simplified

communications plan for the period between October 30 and November 4. The North Vietnamese Army usually introduced such a plan just before initiating combat.

(U) The 330th issued a tactical warning for that period. It was not taken seriously. U.S. units in the region were unused to SIGINT, and expected that it would be confirmed by collateral intelligence if it had any validity.

Approved for Release by NSA on 04-12-2019, FOIA Case # 84783

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

10/26/2018

(U) On November 1, amidst increasing indications that the SIGINT warning was correct, the U.S. command hit the area with a B-52 strike, then deployed infantry units. The attack confirmed that the North Vietnamese had staged large units in the area, and were readying for their own attack.

(U) The Battle for Dak To had mixed results. The North Vietnamese goal had been to eject the Americans from the region; in this, they failed. However, U.S. casualties were heavy: 376 killed and over 1,000 wounded. American commanders differed on how many enemy were killed, but it probably was over 1,000.

(U) Speaking years after the event, Tom Glenn noted that local U.S. combat units were more ready thereafter to accept SIGINT as valid.

(U) Tom Glenn later became the senior NSA representative in Saigon. He was one of the last NSA personnel to leave the country as Communist forces took over the capital.

(U) To discuss historical topics with interesting folks, visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

(U) Have a question or comment on History Today? Contact us at [DL cch](#) or

Information Owner:   
Page Publisher:   
Last Modified: October 27, 2015  
Last Reviewed: October 27, 2015

~~DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20180110, DECLASSIFY ON: 20430110~~  
UNCLASSIFIED

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36