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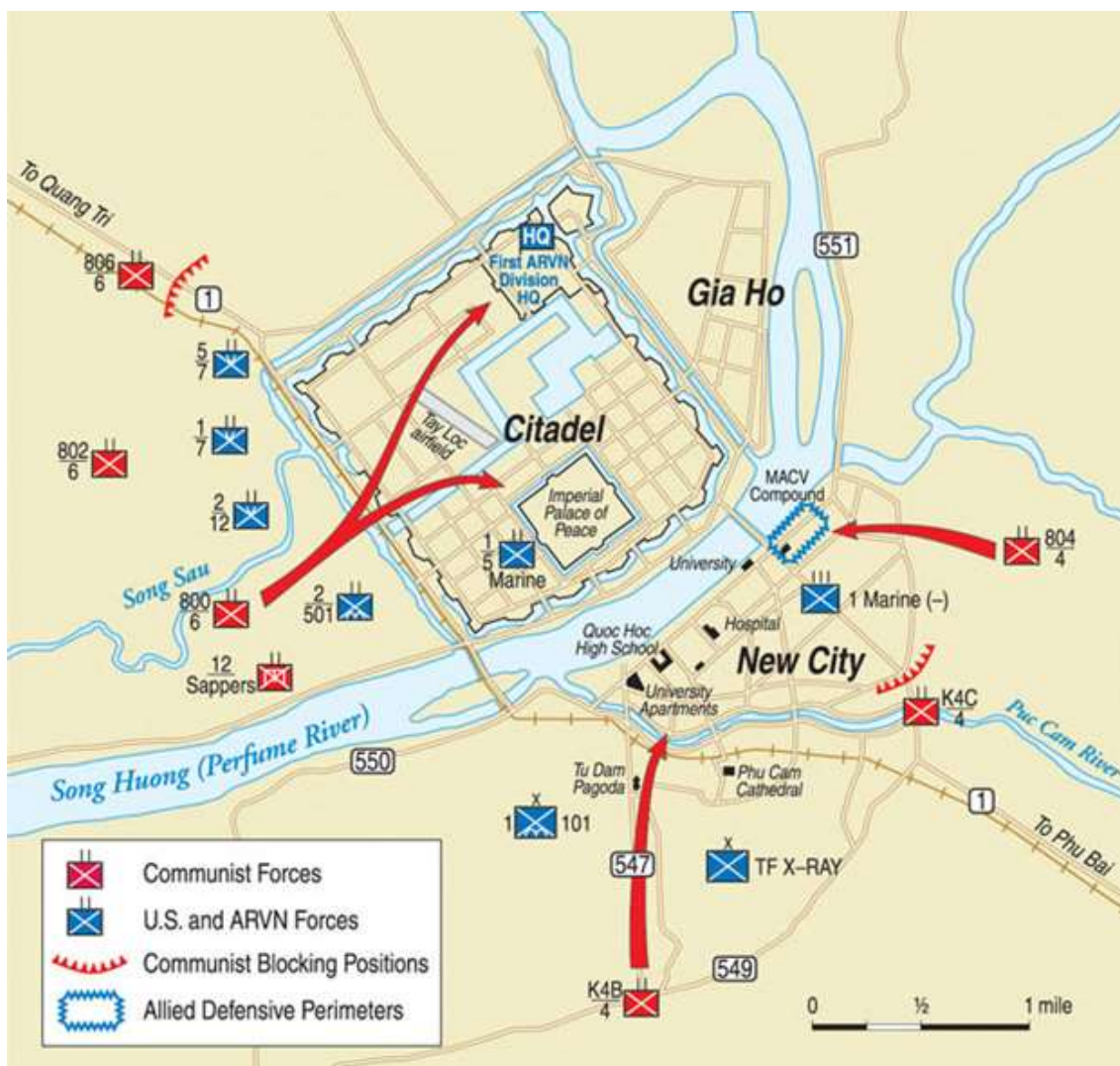
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**Subject:** Observations during the first day of Tet in Hue, 1968

**Date:** Mon, Jan 29, 2018 1:51 pm

January 31st, 2018 will mark the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Hue.

On January 31, 1968, I was a Captain, serving as the Assistant G-2 Advisor to the 1st ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Division in the City of Hue (pop 140,000). Early in the morning on the first day of the Vietnamese holiday of Tet, 10,000 VC and NVA troops assaulted and took most of the city. The only hold outs were the 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division Headquarters and the MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) compound where I was located along with several hundred military personnel.



Others have described the battle far better than I could, I just want to note some of things I saw and heard that first day. During an attack, we all had our assigned positions. Mine was in my room, which was on the bottom floor of a two-story structure that had been an old motel with two rooms and a bath in each suite. Two of us slept in the front and one in the back room. My bed was next to the window which looked directly onto the front gate. We were to defend that gate which was on the north side of the compound. To do so I had an automatic weapon with one 20 round clip. Fortunately, no attack came from that direction. I should also mention there were probably 20 to 30 others with the same mission including one of my roommates, Captain Bob Williams, USMC.



The attack started about 3:30 am when a mortar round hit about 15 feet outside my room, destroying two jeeps and covering me with glass. Now awake, I dressed, found my weapon and looked out the window to see the jeeps burning next to the main gate. Shortly thereafter, I heard small arms being fired on the south side of the compound and a machine gun located about 50 feet to my right on a tower opened up. I then heard an explosion and the machine gun stopped firing. I found out later it was knocked out by a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) round, mortally wounding the Sargent manning that position.

Rifle, automatic weapons fire, and explosions continued thru the night, sometimes intense, sometimes sporadic. At daybreak, the sounds seemed to be more distance rather than in and around the compound. About 8:00 the mist cleared and we looked out to see what appeared to be a North Vietnamese flying over the city. As we were looking around, Bob noted that our flag had been blown down by the force of some of the explosions, so, in great Marine tradition, he gather up several other Marines, and put it back up. It was a very welcome sight over the next 24 days.

I was soon called to the Command Bunker. The Division Senior Advisor, Colonel Adkinson, a Korean War vet and West Point graduate, directed me to contact the Corps Senior Advisor and get him on the phone for him. After what seemed to be a long time, I got thru and handed the phone to him and he said, as best as I remember it, "...I want you to know we are surrounded and cut off. We are just about out of ammunition and medical supplies. If somebody does not break thru to us, we will not make it thru the night."

Unknown to us, a Marine task force set out to reach us about 8:30 am from the Marine base at Phu Bai 7 miles south of us. They reached us about 3:30 pm and two Marine officers came into the Command Bunker and greeted Col. Adkinson. Adkinson told the Marine Company Commander to position his unit around the compound but the Marine Captain stated he could not do that as his orders were to reach the MACV Compound and then proceed across the river and go to the 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division Headquarters and escort General Truong, the Division Commander, to Phu Bai. Adkinson responded by stating he had spoken with General Truong a number of times during the day and he was safe in his Headquarters and if you do make it to his Headquarters he certainly would not leave it to go with you to Phu Bai. But, you can do a great thing for our country by taking your unit several blocks from here and bring his wife and children back here as he is very worried about her. The Captain replied that he had his orders and he turned around and left the Bunker. Several of us followed him out and told him the bridge he had to cross was partially blown and they would have to cross on foot in clear sight of an unknown number of enemy automatic weapons positions and then would have to deal with the Citadel, a medieval type of fort with moats and 30-foot-tall walls 40 feet thick. Once again, he stated he had his orders and went to gather up his unit. They returned about an hour or so later carrying with them 10 dead and 56 wounded, about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of his unit.

I learned much later that a call had been made back to his Headquarters to explain the situation had changed, but, they were told to proceed as ordered. I have also learned that the original enemy attack plan for the MACV Compound included two NVA Battalions, however, one got lost on their way to us and the other diverted by some unexpected resistance.

For those interested in more details, I recommend "The Siege at Hue" by George W. Smith. George was an advisor assigned to our Advisor Team and was in the Compound when it was attacked. I met him there and he told me he was going to write a book about the battle and he did 30 years later. Another book with much more detail is "HUE 1968 A Turning Point of the American War in Vietnam" by Mark Bowden that was published in 2017.

Dave K.

