

Intelligence In Tet Fight Held Success

By Don Oberdorfer

Washington Post Staff Writer

The civilian and military intelligence chiefs told a House committee yesterday that the 1968 Tet offensive in South Vietnam was a U.S. intelligence success, not the failure that has recently been charged.

William E. Colby, lame-duck director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said "clear warnings" of a forthcoming Communist attack around the time of the Jan. 30 lunar new year had caused alerts in South Vietnam which aided military commanders and minimized the losses of lives and resources.

"It was in large part due to these intelligence warnings that the Vietnamese Communists failed to obtain their goal of a decisive victory for the Communist cause. The fact of the matter as we look back in history is that the Tet offensive was a calamitous setback for the Communist forces in 1968," Colby told the House intelligence committee.

Lt. Gen. Daniel O. Graham, lame-duck director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, called the Tet offensive "an attempted surprise attack" which was detected in advance and said it was "totally inaccurate" to say that Tet was an intelligence failure. At the time a lieutenant colonel, Graham was chief of current estimates for the U.S. Military

Command in Saigon during the 1968 battle.

Colby was ousted by President Ford in last month's high-level shakeup but agreed to stay on until his successor takes office. After Mr. Ford fired Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, Graham resigned because of his close association with the defense chief.

The House committee, chaired by Rep. Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.), scheduled its day-long session on the Tet events because of testimony it received Sept. 18 from former CIA analyst Sam Adams. Adams charged that the CIA and military intelligence conspired to cover up his reliable estimates of Vietnamese Communist strength, thus contributing to a devastating surprise in the Tet offensive.

Colby presented a lengthy compilation of pre-1968 CIA reports urging an upward revision of official estimates of Communist strength in South Vietnam. Graham defended the statistics being used by the U.S. military at the time, and declared that in any case the estimates had no impact on the Tet battle.

The previously secret report of an interagency team that investigated the Tet intelligence in April, 1968, was declassified for the Pike committee yesterday. The team found that clear warnings of a massive attack were "no small achievement" for U.S. intelligence in view of the absence of any high-level penetrations of the Communist hierarchy.

At the same time, the report said, "The intensity, coordination and timing of the enemy attack were not fully anticipated."

Rep. Philip H. Hayes (D-Iowa) noted that the Tet offensive—designed to bring about a popular uprising in Vietnam—actually caused "a massive uprising in the United States," where the shock wave forced a change in war policy. He asked Graham if he had not erred in failing to predict the U.S. impact.

The former Vietnam intelligence officer—now U.S. military intelligence chief—rejected the argument. "It is not important for an intelligence officer to go around assessing the American people," Graham declared.

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