

# U.S. Intelligence Was Surprised By Enemy's Drive, Aides Assert

By BENJAMIN WELLES

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WASHINGTON, May 10—Evidence has begun to emerge here that United States intelligence was caught by surprise by the direction, timing and power of the North Vietnamese offensive in South Vietnam.

The National Security Council's Intelligence Committee, headed by Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's national security adviser, reportedly concluded that the main enemy thrust would come from west to east against Kontum in the Central Highlands and not, as happened, from north to south

across the demilitarized zone to Quangtri.

Some senior intelligence analysts here insist that there has been no "intelligence failure" during the five-week offensive in Vietnam. They add that the enemy build-up had been observed and meticulously reported since it began early in the year.

"We've kept the policy-makers fully informed" said one source, who asked not to be identified. "There's been no disagreement about the enemy capability. We saw the build-up—though we couldn't tell just

Continued on Page 19, Column 4

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Continued From Page 1, Col. 8

when or where he'd strike. What our policy-makers or the South Vietnamese did with our reports is out of our hands."

Nonetheless, there are other veteran United States intelligence officials who concede that the North Vietnamese gained a major tactical surprise—and four or five days of virtually unimpeded advance, which led to the seizure of Quangtri—by hitting where and when it was least expected.

"The intelligence people did not anticipate that the North Vietnamese would take the coastal route down Highway 1 and infiltrate the pre-Communist zone in 18 years the first time," said one source. "The surprise was that for a short route," one source said, "the Vietnamese would take the war was destroyed."

In addition, intelligence sources here acknowledge that they have been surprised by the vast quantities of bulky and often complex weapons moved as much as 600 to 700 miles south by trucks, river boats and even on bicycles pushed or ridden over jungle trails.

"We knew an offensive was coming," said one intelligence analyst, "but we didn't know the quantity, and the types of their supplies, the distribution into future battle areas, and especially the amount of their ammunition. They dropped more than 2,000 artillery rounds into Anloc a few days ago."

Some officials here concede that the United States, despite its array of electronic technology, infrared photography, acoustical "sensors" and aerial-surveillance techniques, appears to have been outwitted by the North Vietnamese.

"We've been listening in on their radio communications for years—and they know it," said one informant. "They're getting more sophisticated. They're beginning to use counter-measures."

The United States aerial flights that used infrared devices to pick up heat arising from large masses moving at night and the electronic "sensors" scattered by the thousands by United States aircraft over the Ho Chi Minh trail retrack are "imperfect,"

sources here say.

"We know when something's going along the trail," said one source, "but we don't always know whether it's a truck—or a tank."

The appearance of about 30 North Vietnamese tanks—half of them 40-ton T-54's and the rest 15-ton amphibious PT-76's around Tay Ninh and Anloc surprised both the United States and South Vietnamese.

Whether they were disassembled and brought south by truck or river boat, or whether they were driven at night and camouflaged by day to avoid United States air attacks, is still unclear. But each trip must have taken two to three months, in the view of specialists here.

The steady reduction in United States ground combat in recent months and the cut-back—until the current offensive—of much American aerial surveillance are cited as reasons why the North managed to achieve these surprises.

"We've cut way back on our SLAR," an informant said, referring to Sideways-Looking Airborne Radar flights. "Even radar isn't much help when you're trying to peer through two or three canopies of jungle or through camouflage strung for miles over trails."

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**FLEEING THE NORTHERN FRONT: South Vietnamese soldiers and civilian refugees on Route 1 south of Quangtri**