Recommended Read: 'Break in the Chain Intelligence Ignored'

Did you know the AOC has a Recommended Reading Program?

The program's goal is to help EW experts extend personal and professional development beyond their current knowledge by enhancing professionalism and improve critical thinking skills, fostering a deep appreciation for EW history and heritage and to further develop warfighters by enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Soon to be added to our recommended reading list is "Break in the Chain Intelligence Ignored" by AOC member Bob Baker. Please enjoy the following excerpt from the book:

> *Amid the largest North Vietnamese offensive of the war up to 1972, there were some American forces and advisors still present, another "battle of sorts" raged beneath the surface. This peculiar fight involved U.S. intelligence and the upper command elements of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces.*
>
> *This was not a unique situation during the war. For instance, in 1967 Major General Peers famously belittled intelligence (this time SIGINT) with, "So I'm supposed to believe that some kind of magic allows a bunch of shaky girbs (GI Rat Bastards) distinguished more for their spit and their polish and abetted by a civilian, to use a tangle of antennas and funny talk, to divine the combat plans of the enemy?" The 4th Infantry Division commander waved their warning away and, as you may have guessed, were attacked a few days later.*
>
> *Fast-forward to March 1972. The 571st Military Intelligence (MI) Detachment (recently reorganized from the 1st Provisional*

Battalion), 525th MI Group, had started reporting about an imminent multi-divisional offensive before it occurred on March 30th, 1972. The more "usual" problem was that the intelligence was HUMINT-based, this time.

The Easter Offensive of 1972 kicked off in I Corps with the North Vietnamese Army attacking through the Demilitarized Zone (violating yet another signed agreement) and Laos, followed by the NVA invading III Corps, then II Corps days later.

There was no forewarning given, no alerts, no prepositioning, nothing. The senior-most MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) commander and his J-2 (Intelligence) were both out of the country.

The senior officers in each of the corps' areas gave a variety of excuses for not knowing about the NVA invasion. Such as I Corps (FRAC) commander, MG Kroesen, who only had a token intelligence and operations section that "was neither manned nor equipped to monitor the combat activity or to provide tactical guidance." The 571st was there and provided I Corps (which had become the First Regional Assistance Command, FRAC) with Intelligence Summaries twice a day, by hand, with this and other information. MACV also received them electronically. The II Corps (SRAC) commander, John Paul Vann, bluntly stated on February 7, 1972, "Nearly all reliable intelligence is limited to US S.I. Channels" (SIGINT). This viewpoint was true as far back as World War II and it remains so today. The III Corps (TRAC) commander, Major General Hollingsworth, fired an officer for insisting that the HUMINT information on forthcoming enemy activity was correct (it was).

Vann wasn't the only one to think that SIGINT/COMINT was the best source for intelligence MACV, DIA, and NSA (of course felt the same way.

While SIGINT held sway, PHOTINT (imagery) was also valued. The problem with both was they were sometimes used against US and South Vietnamese forces. For instance, "In 1969, a dozen members of the NVA's Technical Reconnaissance Unit A-3 were captured on the Michelin rubber plantation northeast of Saigon. Voice and manual Morse intercept operators were among those captured. US AN/PRC-25 and AN/PRC-77 radios ("bought from our South Vietnamese allies or third parties") and several Chinese R-139 HF receivers, and other commercial equipment were obtained. Unit A-3's records disclosed detailed American protocols and procedures, and verbatim transcripts of radio transmissions over a period of four years were also part of this intelligence bonanza."

Photographs could sometimes "lie," too. Photographs of a concentration of T-54 tanks just across the border from Tay Ninh in Cambodia turned up early in the Easter Offensive of 1972. It turned out these tanks were literally made of cardboard and were designed to deceive us into thinking that the major line of communist attack would be directed at Tay Ninh, rather than Loc Ninh.

In early-April 1972, replying to the PACOM Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) Center personnel studying the SA-2B vs. SA-2F problem (and the lack of any electronic difference between them), GEN Abrams stated, "I'm not so much interested in the Intelligence Community. I'm interested in the fight that's going on and what can be done about it. Well, these people that are studying it—suppose they came down here and flew in the gunships. Wouldn't that motivate them to study it harder?" Obviously, some of Abrams' people didn't either or they didn't like what they were told.

So too were there examples of real-time enemy SIGINT/Communications Intelligence (COMINT) during the Easter Offensive. One occurred on April 9th in the vicinity of FB Pedro. There was a problem in identifying NVA tanks by a

Forward Air Controller (FAC). In response to the query, the FAC was told to identify the the tanks with red flags flying from their antennas – the enemy tanks almost immediately dropped their flags.

Just as in many wars, there are a lot of things occurring behind the scenes during the Easter Offensive of 1972. It was a time of many firsts and even heroics by US forces, which need to be known.

After graduating first in the intelligence analyst course in 1971, W. R. (Bob) Baker was assigned to the 571st Military Intelligence Detachment/525th Military Intelligence Group in Da Nang, Vietnam and was present at the time of the Easter Offensive of 1972. Further assignments after Vietnam included positions as a forward area 24-hour watch analyst, electronic order of battle analyst for Syria, Lebanon and the eastern littoral of Africa, Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War and Poland during the Crisis at the European Defense Analysis Center (EUDAC)/HQ, USEUCOM. He was awarded the Bronze Star, Defense Meritorious Service, Joint Service and Army Commendation Medals. With a BS from the University of Maryland and MS from the University of Dayton, Bob also worked in the defense industry and education for 16 and 12 years, respectively. He has authored several articles on the Easter Offensive of 1972, intelligence and Vietnam for the Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin/Marine Corps Intelligence Summary, American Intelligence Journal, Vietnam Magazine and the Small Wars Journal.

Break in the Chain Intelligence Ignored is published by Casemate has been hailed as *"the book to read for an accurate picture of what really took place during the pivotal 1972 North Vietnamese Easter Offensive."*