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Analyzing the Characteristics of the 1968 Spring General Offensive and Uprising in the South Central Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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Abstract

The spring Mau Than general offensive in the Central Southern Delta went through 3 attacks. In all three attacks, the army and people of the entire region attacked many important key locations in cities, towns, and townships, contributing to a significant loss of enemy forces, causing shocked situations for the controlled apparatus in most provinces, districts and communes, contributing to the overall victory of the entire region. The general offensive and uprising in the delta provinces of the Central Southern region has a number of unique characteristics that need to be studied to contribute to summarizing the theory and practice of the general offensive and uprising in the 1968 spring, that is the problem of force preparation and organization not ensuring a large scale general attack, combat plans are not consistent with local realities and lack of flexibility, and the work of launching and preparing the ideology for the masses is not good.

Keywords: General Offensive, Uprising, Spring Mau Than, Delta Region

1. Introduction

The 1968 Mau Than Tet event in Vietnam (Vietnamese books and magazines often refer to it as the 1968 Tet Offensive and Uprising) was a general attack and mobilization of the masses to rise up to seize power on the occasion of the 1968 Tet Mau Than by the Liberation Army of the South Vietnam. The campaign took place in most urban areas in the South, hitting key areas of the US military and the Republic of Vietnam regime. This is one of the largest military campaigns, having a role and consequence that is a turning point in the Vietnamese people's resistance war against the US for national salvation.

The Central Southern Mekong Delta (CSMD) region includes the provinces of Long An, Tien Giang, Dong Thap, Ben Tre, and An Giang. At the time of the spring Mau Than general offensive and uprising (1968), the CSMD region corresponded to the provinces of Long An, My Tho, Go Cong, Kien Tuong, Kien Phong, Ben Tre, and An Giang. This is the area of commanding revolution and resistance war of Military district 8 of the Vietnam People's

Army (War zone 8 was established in December 1945 the liberation of the South, War zone 8 War zone 9 merged into the current 9th Military Region) (HCMR, 1996). Since entering the resistance war against America for national salvation, the CSMD has been the place where the armed struggle movement and revolutionary armed forces were born earliest in the Southern. The beginning was to take advantage of the sectarian conflict to form "anti-robbery" teams to protect the Party organization and protect the revolutionary movement in Long An and Kien Tuong from 1955 – 1959 (LAVCP, 2005). After the resolution 15 of the Central Committee of Communist Party was issued, the CSMD was the place initiating and also the hottest place of the "uprise together" of the masses to break the restraint and take control in communes and hamlets. From the "detonator" in Ben Tre, the uprise together movement quickly spread throughout the Central Southern, the Southern and the South, forming a revolutionary storm that agitated the Saigon authorities and the entire United States. The CSMD was also the place where the Ap Bac battle took place - a large-scale battle in the early stage of the war between Vietnam and the United States, resulting in the first major victory of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam's guerrillas against the regular army of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam commanded by American advisors (TGVCP, 2011). The CSMD is also the first place where a two-legged (politics, army) and three-pronged (politics, military, military proselyting) strategic model appeared, which has been summarized into an important theoretical lesson in the resistance war against America for national salvation. Regarding the general offensive and uprising spring Mau Than (1968), what role did the CSMD region play, and how did it impact the general offensive and uprising spring Mau Than in the entire South and what theoretical lessons did it leave behind in the revolutionary war in Vietnam? This article presents the force preparation process, combat plans, developments, results and characteristics of the 1968 Mau Than spring general offensive in the CSMD. The article will further contribute to clarifying the theory and practice of the largest general offensive and uprising in South Vietnam in 1968.

2. Document Overview And Research Methods

2.1. Overview Document

In recent years, the 1968 Tet Mau Than Offensive and Uprising in Vietnam has remained an attractive topic for historical researchers. In the scientific documental literature, there are always new publications that study this event in more depth annually. Vu Thien Binh (2017) outlined the historical marks of the General Offensive and Uprising in the Spring Mau Than 1968, affirming the victory of Vietnamese bravery and intelligence, lessons, and historical significance for the current efforts to construction and defense the Vietnamese Fatherland and foreign assessments through the 1968 General Offensive and Uprising in the Spring of Mau Than. Ly Viet Quang (2018), presenting decisions of the Party, President Ho Chi Minh, Central Military Party Commission, Central Office for South in leading and commanding the General Offensive and Uprising; the participation of forces, military branches and the masses in the attack; the publication also analyzes the historical significance, causes of victory and valuable experiences of the 1968 Mau Than General Offensive and Uprising. Ngo Minh Oanh (2018), collected many articles by lecturers and officials, postgraduate students in the process of teaching, researching and learning about outstanding events in the resistance war against the US for national salvation, about the historical stature, the process of general attack and uprising and memories about the 1968 Tet Mau Than. Thu Phuong (2023), presented conferences, documents, telegrams, letters during the 1968 Tet Mau Than Offensive and Uprising to the main developments of the Tet Mau Than Offensive and Uprising 1968. Ho Khang (2018) presents and analyzes the formation process of the 1968 Tet Mau Than Offensive and Uprising Plan, the strategic diversions of the headquarters, leaders and chief of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the battlefield; at the same time, it introduces the developments of the General Offensive at major cities in South Vietnam and the multi-dimensional impacts of the 1968 Tet Mau Than Offensive. Some authors have exploited special aspects of the Tet Mau Than General offensive and uprising during the Tet Offensive. Multiauthor Books (2003), presenting the historical context and struggle movement of youth – students in Saigon – Gia Dinh 1966 – 1967, armed attack between Saigon and memories of the 1968 Mau Than General Offensive. Ha Minh Hong (2018) collected in-depth research on the battlefield of the Saigon – Gia Dinh key area, the most special and unique battlefield form during the resistance war against America for national salvation when carrying out the general offensive and uprising in the spring of Mau Than 1968. Nguyen Van Tau (2022), truthfully and vividly records the actions, thoughts, courage, intelligence, resolute actions and self-sacrifice of real characters and fictional characters (intelligence, corps, commandos) during the years of resistance, specifically is Saigon in the Spring of Mau Than 1968. Bui Van

Nam (2019) evaluates the leadership and command of the Party and the Ministry of Public Security during the 1968 Spring Mau Than General Offensive and; the role and contribution of the People's public security and South Vietnamese security forces in the General Offensive; Saigon – Gia Dinh Front during the General Offensive and Uprising in 1968; values, meanings and lessons learned. Nguyen Quoc Bao, Nguyen Thi Yen Thu, Tran Than My (2019) selected articles, memoirs, and compositions of many South teachers and students who directly participated in the 1968 Spring Mau Than General Offensive and Uprising; thereby, recreating a heroic period of South education.

Inheriting the research direction of projects above, this article uses related documents published in projects of the 9th Military Region High Command (1996), The Organ Of Dong Thap Province's *Vietnam Communist Party (VCP)* (1997), The Organ Of An Giang Province's *VCP* (2007), The Organ Of Ben Tre Province's *VCP* (2003), The Organ Of Long An Province's *VCP* (2005), The Organ Of An Giang Province's *VCP* (2007), The Organ Of Tien Giang Province's *VCP* (2011).

2.2. Research Methods

The article uses historical research methods, specializing in the History of the Vietnamese Communist Party (MOET, 2021). By applying the Party history major, the article complies with the principle of presenting historical events according to the context, policies, and leadership methods of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and the Liberation Army of South Command, Party Committee of War zone 8; state the developments, results, meaning and characteristics of the event; helps recognize the process of the Party Committee of War zone 8 and local party committees grasped and applied objective rules in the process of planning guidelines and practically directing the revolutionary struggle movement of the locality and region merged with the Vietnamese revolutionary movement in a specific period, a specific revolutionary struggle movement.

3. Results

3.1. Preparing forces and combat plans in the CSMD

At the end of 1967, the Standing Committee of the the Party Committee of War zone 8 received a resolution from the Politburo on shifting the South revolutionary struggle to a period of decisive victory, urgently mobilized the highest efforts of the entire Party, the entire people, and the entire army to carry out a general uprising throughout the South. At this time, in the Central Southern region, there were two major military concentration location of the Saigon government: My Tho city and Ben Tre town. In My Tho, the Saigon government arranged 1 battalion of the 7th Infantry division, 1 ranger corp battalion, 1 US army brigade, 1 armored battalion, 2 artillery battalions, 1 river brigade. The general force of My Tho province is about over 20,000 troops, including over 3,000 American soldiers. As for My Tho town, the Saigon government arranged security companies to occupy important positions, closing all intersections (TGVCP, 2011). On January 31, 1968, President Nguyen Van Thieu returned to My Tho during Tet, the government of the Republic of Vietnam reinforced the 32nd ranger corp battalion are stationed in field in a number of key positions and added 3 reconnaissance companies of the 7th Infantry Division into the city center; besides, there are also armored and artillery forces in Dong Tam sub-zone (TGVCP, 2011)). In Ben Tre town, the Republic of Vietnam force consists of 4 battalions of the 10th regiment, 7th Infantry division, 9 security companies, and 1 artillery battalion. In total, Ben Tre province has over 13,000 troops (BTVCP, 2003). In Go Cong, there are forces from the 4th battalion, 12th regiment and other security and people's self - defense forces. In Kien Tuong, the Saigon government arranged 1 infantry battalion of the 7th Infantry division, 9 security companies, 25 civil defense platoons, 2 commando platoons, 1 reconnaissance platoon, 2 artillery platoons and 1 boat (TGVCP, 2011). In Kien Phong, there is an infantry battalion belonging to the 9th Infantry division, along with security and civil defense forces, police, artillery, and armor (LAVCP, 2005). In An Giang, the Republic of Vietnam army focused on guarding the target of Chau Doc town and Long Xuyen town with about 20,000 troops. For the Chau Doc town has 2,000 troops as well as many armored vehicles and boats (AGVCP, 2007).

To prepare forces for the general offensive and uprising, the Central Office for South commanded the transfer of areas and redeployment of the Central Southern region battlefield. Long An province was assigned to the Central

Office to combine with the Saigon - Cho Lon area to attack the center of Saigon. Separate the two districts Go Cong Dong and Go Cong Tay of My Tho province to establish a new province, Go Cong. My Tho town was identified as the first key location and upgraded from a town to a city. The second key location is Ben Tre town. After redeploying the area, Party Committee of War Zone 8 established a Front line High Command and quickly built up its forces. Localities urgently recruited more recruits, partisans, supplemented troops to the armed units of the region, province, and district and strongly developed commune and hamlet guerrillas. Regarding the main troops of the war zone, according to the command of the Central Office, the Central Southern region must hand over to the Regional Command 3 main infantry battalions (265, 267, 269). Therefore, within 1 month, under conditions of absolute secrecy, the region hastily mobilized forces from the provinces and mobilized all officials from the civil - political - party sectors to take guns to the front. From the strength of the localities, the Regional Party Committee decided to build three new battalions: 261B, 265B and 267B. My Tho province moved to 1 battalion region (514A). The entire new army combined with the two old battalions, 261A and 263B, organized into two combat groups. For the provinces, after moving troops to the war zones, they focus on building battalions. Ben Tre is the province that mobilizes the largest number of troops, including 4 battalions. The provinces of Go Cong, Kien Tuong, Kien Phong, and An Giang all have at least 1 battalion. Each district has at least one company, maximum district has 3 companies. Strong communes have 1-2 platoons. Each hamlet has 1-2 guerrilla squads. Towns and towns have 1-3 rangers corp squads. My Tho alone is the first key area, so 3 rangers corp companies are assigned (BTVCP, 2003).

After basically forming the force for the general attack, the Regional Party Committee assigned and arranged forces in each area cluster to be ready to receive combat orders. At key location 1 (My Tho city), the Regional Party Committee arranged 6 infantry battalions divided into 2 combat groups: combat group 1 includes battalions 261A, 261B and 514A, combat group 2 includes battalions 263B, 265B, 267B, 1 mortar company 120, 2 mortar platoons 82; the army of My Tho city has 3 infantry companies, 3 rangers corp detachments and 1 mortar company 82; each district has 1 secret guerrilla squad, each communes have 1 to 2 guerrilla squads; The Party base in the city has 4 party cells, 20 party members, 50 core members; in communes, each party cell has from 10 to 25 party members and 10-30 young workers; mass forces were mobilized and organized into large teams; Logistics assigned each family to prepare 20kg of rice, while mills prepared from 1,500 to 3,000 Gia of rice. At key location 2 (Ben Tre town), the general attack force is arranged including 4 infantry battalions (516, 2, 3, 4) of the area in coordination with the province's units, all of those formed into 1 regiment; Ben Tre town has 1 infantry company and 1 rangers corp platoon; The province brought in 7 battalions, guerrilla militia and rebel forces expected in about 10,000 people; Mo Cay and Giong Trom districts each have 1 infantry battalion (lack); other districts have companies; each district has 2 guerrilla militia battalions; the masses mobilized about 22,000 people throughout the province. In Go Cong province, the regional force has battalion 514B; each district has 1 local company and 1 rangers corps unit; Ben Tre town has a secret self-defense team; each commune has from 2 squads to 1 guerrilla platoon. In Kien Tuong, after the province supplemented its troops, the command area force had battalion 504, 3 commando companies, 1 rangers corp platoon; the province additional built an information platoon and 1 frontline worker platoon; Female officers and soldiers in Kien Tuong made up the majority. In Kien Phong, the Regional Party Committee commanded to take a part of battalion 502 and mobilize officers, employees, and district soldiers to form the battalion 2 and 1 fire company; each district builds from 2 platoons to 1 local company; Cao Lanh town has a commando platoon. In An Giang, a part of battalion 512 was mobilized to coordinate with an armed security platoon and district soldiers to form battalion 2; mobilize the district's army force and mobilize the staff of provincial agencies and overseas Vietnamese-Cambodian youth to form battalion 3; mobilize people and overseas Vietnamese along the border to actively support the revolutionary financial (AGVCP, 2011).

Regarding the combat plan: In key location 1, in the first 30 minutes, the artillery will fire 1,200 shells at a number of targets; two combat groups from the northeast and northwest will move in to capture four targets, including the 7th Infantry Division High Command, My Tho sub-region, the workplace of the American advisor, and the provincial security union; after solving the main objectives, one part was responsible for controlling the supply route from Saigon, the remaining part cooperated with the rebel people to control the area. At key location 2, the main force from the south will attack the center of the province; the main target is the provincial chief palace. In Go Cong, the combat plan is to attack with mortars to oppress the main targets, surround the targets outside, wait for a favorable opportunity to attack the provincial center next time. In Kien Tuong, the goal was to decisively

attack the town, launch the mass uprising to liberate the countryside and ensure the corridor from the war zone to the areas. In Kien Phong, the attack target was Cao Lanh province. In An Giang, Chau Doc town was chosen as the main target (LAVCP, 2005).

3.2. Developments and results of the 1968 Mau Than Spring Offensive in the CSMD

On January 29, 1968, Party Committee of War zone 8 issued an order for a general offensive and uprising, the official time was 0:00 a.m on February 1, 1968. At key location 1 (My Tho city), on the night of August 31, only combat group 1 and battalion 265B of combat group 2 (i.e. 2/3 of the force) arrived at the gathering point on time. In addition, by 0:00, the civilians had not yet had time to deliver 1,200 artillery shells to the location. Therefore, the plan to fire 1,200 artillery shells at 0:00 could not be implemented, instead, at 1:00 a.m., we could only fire 20 mortars 82 at the Cau Quay police station. The rangers corp unit quickly occupied the police station, took control of Cau Quay and expanded to Kham Duong. The fighting in Kham Duong was fierce. The rangers corp shot and burned 1 V100 vehicle and 1 Jeep vehicle, killing 10 policemen. By morning, due to lack of support, the rangers corp unit sacrificed 5 people so they had to withdraw towards My Phong, on the way out, two soldiers still died (TGVCP, 2011).

The second direction of Battalion 514A attacked the 32 Rangers corp Battalion. The fighting took place extremely fiercely on many routes, but faced with very strong resistance, we could not master the intended targets. On the morning of February 1, 1968, the remaining part of Combat group 2, including Battalions 263B and 267B, arrived, at this time, the enemy had very tight defenses so we could not attack the 6th Armored Division base and Hung Vuong training center. Also on the morning of February 1, 1968, a helicopter took Nguyen Van Thieu from My Tho to Saigon. On February 2, 1968, fighting in the inner city of My Tho was still tense, with neither side mastering the area. On the morning of March 3, 1968, the 3rd Brigade (9th US Division) and the entire 11th Regiment (7th Division) with strong armor and artillery support entered the inner city to sweep. The fighting raged from morning until afternoon, burning over 100 houses, our battalions suffered heavy damage and had to withdraw to the outskirts. Coordinating with the main forces to attack in My Tho city, the districts of My Tho province also mobilized thousands of people to coordinate with guerrillas to destroy National Route 4 (National Route 1), collapse a number of bridges to cut off contact and traffic. In the outskirts, the withdrawn force continued to fight, causing some damage to the enemy. A typical example is the battle on February 10, 1968 of the 514C battalion against a battalion of the 7th division of the Republic of Vietnam in Tan Hoi, killing 100 soldiers and destroying 5 M113 vehicles (TGVCP, 2011).

In early February 1968, the Central Office of the South command War zone 8 to continue organizing forces to attack My Tho city. Implementing the policy of the Central Office, Party Committee of War zone 8 reorganized its forces, whereby the 2 main combat groups were redeployed into 2 regiments. Regiment 1 includes battalions 261A, 261B, 265B; Regiment 2 includes battalions 263B, 267B, 514A. Although efforts were made to prepare, the simultaneous attack plan had to be canceled at the last moment due to the enemy strengthening its forces and defending very tightly. Instead, the forces of the two regiments only carried out a few single battles. On the night of February 17, 1968, battalion 514A attacked the eastern defense line, destroyed the Cau Quay blockhouse, burned an M113 vehicle, a ship on the Bao Dinh river and destroyed a corner of the power plant. At the same time, in Cai Lay, battalion 514C attacked the sub-zone, captured a number of areas and then withdrew. Since the end of February 1968, the army of the Republic of Vietnam counterattacked strongly in the suburb, most notably the communes of Dao Thanh, My Phong, Thanh Binh, My Tinh An... The regular army of War zone 8 actively attacked and cause some damage. During the sweeps and raids by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, many houses were burned and a number of civilians died causing great indignation among compatriots and some civil servants and soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam. That's why the political struggle movement took place enthusiastically. People from suburban communes flocked into the inner city, all the way to the provincial chief's palace and the 7th Infantry Division Command of the Republic of Vietnam to protest. In the rural areas of My Tho, Cai Be, Cai Lay, and Chau Thanh districts, the masses supported guerrillas to rebel and destroy garrisons. In February 1968, My Tho had 12 communes completely liberated, a large number of soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam left their guns and returned home (TGVCP, 2011).

At key location 2 (Ben Tre town), on the night of January 31, 1968, all units of Ben Tre arrived at the gathering point. At exactly 1 o'clock on February 1, 1968, at the same time as My Tho, the firepower group in the main direction shot at the Command center of the 10th Regiment, the 7th Infantry Division and the Provincial Security Group of the Republic of Vietnam. The water commando platoon immediately attacked Dinh Tien Hoang camp, destroyed 6 armored vehicles and held the bridgehead for battalion 516 to cross the river to attack the governor's palace. The regular army destroyed a number of tent posts and blockhouses, and severely damaged security company 289 and the civil defense platoon at Ca Loc bridge. The roads leading to the governor's palace are defended with very strong firepower. Battalion 516 had to disperse into platoons, squads, taking advantage of the terrain to fight. A battalion of the 7th Infantry Division of the Republic of Vietnam from My Hoa mobilized to relieve the governor's palace was also blocked and attacked at Cai Ca bridge. The soldiers took control of some areas but could not capture the governor's palace. A local guerrilla unit whose mission was to contract combat with Battalion 516 to enter the inner city was also almost completely sacrificed. At 5:00 a.m., fellow attackers opened fire on the headquarters of the 10th Regiment (7th Infantry Division) of the Republic of Vietnam. The commando company completely occupied the command headquarters, killed the regimental lieutenant colonel, destroyed 3 military vehicles, and captured 1 combat engineer lieutenant colonel. On February 2, 1968, American gunboats from Ham Luong River and Binh Duc base (My Tho) fired heavily into the inner city, bombers and helicopters bombarded and destroyed Ben Tre market, killing more than 300 compatriots. Sacrifice. Battalion 516 had to retreat to the outskirts. On February 3, 1968, in the inner city, armed police forces and secret guerrillas remained at the base, hunting down and destroying henchmen and villains. Battalion 516 reorganized its forces to continue attacking the provincial security group, destroying the gun depot. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam used aircraft and artillery to destroy many locations. On February 4, 1968, helicopters carrying American soldiers from My Tho came to coordinate sweeps in many locations. Fierce fighting took place throughout February 4th. Both sides' troops suffered heavy losses. While the regular army attacked key positions, on the outskirts of Chau Thanh town and district, guerrillas combined with the masses to pressant a number of garrisons, take control of many areas, and cut off inter-provincial road 6A from Ben Tre town to My Tho. In Mo Cay town, local soldiers and district commandos destroyed a number of garrisons, took control of the defense line outside the sub-zone, and took control of Mo Cay market. The masses and guerrillas barricaded roads and built mounds on the trunk roads leading to the sub-zone. In Cho Lach, guerrillas and the masses attacked and destroyed the garrisons, destroyed the system of hamlets and communes, completely liberating 4 communes and 25 hamlets (BTVCP, 2003).

Go Cong Province take order at 12:00 pm on February 31, 1968 about a general attack. The provincial soldiers urgently deployed a plan to attack the provincial governor's palace, controlled the security battalion, the provincial governor fled. Rangers Corp Unit 207 combined with internal forces to destroy prison camps and free 200 political prisoners (TGVCP, 2011).

In Kien Tuong, at 4 a.m. on February 2nd, 1968, the attack on the town in the east destroyed a number of military garrisons, approach the provincial governor's palace and the civic center. However, the Western division who had a long journey and acrossing the Vam Co Tay River, they could not reach the target to coordinate with the Eastern division. At dawn, the Republic of Vietnam army counterattacked strongly. Most of the commando unit sacrificed their lives. Trying to fight until 10:00 a.m., the remaining forces had to retreat. Due to the unfavorable military blow, the politics and agitation remained dormant. The people in the liberated area organized forces to go to the provincial center, but the situation was unfavorable so they retreated (LAVCP, 2005).

In Kien Phong province, the mainly force arrived at the assembly location on time. By the morning of February 1, 1968, Kien Phong destroyed Cai Vang post, liberated Nhi Binh commune. On the night of February 1, 1968, the liberation army attacked the district chief's palace and the prison area but could not occupy. The majority of the main force remained in communes on the outskirts of the province to support the uprising masses to pressant the outposts, liberate the commune. In 9 days (from February 1-9, 1968), Kien Phong defeated 20 military outposts, killed 600 soldiers, and liberated the communes of Nhi Binh, An Binh, My Ngai, Hoa An, Tan Thuan Tay, and Tinh Thoi. However, the level of casualties is also quite large (DTVCP, 2003).

In An Giang, at 2:31 a.m. on February 1, 1968, armed forces attacked Chau Doc town. After several hours of fighting, the armed forces took control most of the town. The governor of An Giang province could not return to his palace; Captain, on behalf of Chief of staff, trapped in Cao Dai temple. On the morning of February 1, 1968, the armed forces still occupied many important positions in the town. At noon, the campaign military headquarters received news that the situation in the area was becoming complicated. The attack targets in My Tho and Ben Tre were not achieved as planned. On the afternoon of February 1, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam sent the 21st Infantry Division with support aircraft to fiercely bombard the area. On the night of February 1, the campaign Military headquarters decided to withdraw. Despite having to withdraw to the outskirts, An Giang armed forces still organized many attacks throughout January 1968 (AGVCP, 2007).

In April 1968, the Political Bureau of the Party of Central Committee decided to launch a second attack. The goal was to continue to mobilize the entire Party and entire people to continue a comprehensive attack, resolutely made the enemy weaken and disintegrate until unable to get up, won a decisive victory. The specific request is to continue to attack urban areas, create a permanent crisis situation, mobilize the masses to take control of the countryside.

The Central Southern Delta provinces enter the second stage in a very difficult situation. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam greatly reinforced its main forces and war vehicles to continuously counterattack. The armed forces of the region and localities, after the losses in the first stage, only had enough strength to stick to the outskirts, trying to reduce losses to wait for orders to attack cities and towns, there were no longer any support forces for the vast countryside behind it.

On the night of May 4, 1968, War zone 8 entered the second stage of the attack. In My Tho city, the rangers corp attacked many positions: American housing project, police station, 6th Armored base; Engineering forces divided Route 4; guerrillas in Binh Trung, Long Hung, Song Thuan communes; Binh Duc ring road guerrillas destroyed an American unit; Battalion 514C stood at Cai Be to destroy a number of posts in Hoi Cu, Hau My, My Thien... In Gon Cong, battalion 514B destroyed Son Quy post and pacification and counterattack groups of the Republic of Vietnam in Binh Lac, Binh Phu, Binh Nhi, Dong Tho... By the end of May 1968, My Tho and Go Cong consumed over 2,000 soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam (including 398 American soldiers), destroyed 70 military vehicles and 4 artilleries. However, subsequent counterattacks by the Republic of Vietnam army pushed the liberation armed forces far away from the city and standing key areas.

In Ben Tre, on the night of May 4, 1968, the second stage of the general offensive began with the battle of Phu Hung post, with the intention of pulling the 10th Regiment of 7th Infantry Division of the Republic of Vietnam to the rescue but could not pull it. Next, in 6 days and nights from May 5 to 11, 1968, the main force of the war zone organized 6 battles against many targets in Ben Tre town and suburbs. On February 5, 1968, the main force of the war zone divided into two directions and advanced through the Phu Hung – Huu Dinh field to surround the local Chau Thanh company the fighting raged for 14 hours. The US had to send a battalion to the rescue, but they were caught in an ambush by the liberation army, 100 US soldiers were destroyed. On the night of May 11, 1958, the commandos continued to attack the town, destroying two posts in Thanh Phu. On the morning of May 12, the Republic of Vietnam army launched a counterattack. The liberating army still fought, causing some damage to the enemy. Although the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was clearly weakened after the battles, the liberation forces of the region and locality were not capable of completely taking over the town. By July 1968, Ben Tre gathered units into bases at Luong Phu, Thuan Dien, Long My (Giong Trom district) to strengthen its forces. On the night of July 22, 1968, there was a major raid by American troops got into Giong Trom, the liberation army and local guerrilla forces fought back fiercely (BTVCP, 2003).

On the Kien Tuong battlefield, in the second stage, the liberation army had to both prepare to attack and resist a very strong counterattack by the Republic of Vietnam army. On April 4, 1968, provincial soldiers intercepted two security companies from My An that raided Tan Ninh, killing and capturing 75 soldiers. On April 24, 1968, the main force of the region and Dong Thuan guerrillas fought against raids in Thuy Dong, killing 64 soldiers and shooting down 4 planes. On April 31, 1968, provincial soldiers attacked ships at Phung Thoat canal, Nhon Ninh commune, sinking 2 ships. Battalion 263B of the area attacked 1 battalion of the 10th Regiment, 7th Infantry

Division of the Republic of Vietnam, sweeping at Trai Lon, killing 80 soldiers. On May 10, 1968, the 504th battalion of the region destroyed most of the "Crazy Buffalo" commando battalion at Nguyen Van Troi canal, Hung Dien commune, then attacked Cai Doi post, defeated the 86th coast guard rangers corp battalion and 2 reconnaissance platoons in Vinh Dai commune, killed over 100 soldiers. At the end of May 1968, the regional headquarters directed War zone 8 to assign Kien Tuong province the task of attacking Tan An town (Long An province). This is a new area, the defense of the Republic of Vietnam army is very strong. Kien Tuong province urgently reconnoitered, researched and mobilized battalion 504 to march from the Cambodian border to Chau Thanh district (Tan An). On May 20, 1968, the battalion began to attack but did not have enough force to attack key positions directly and had to attack from the outside. The battalion stuck to Tan An town, fought a few small battles, did not meet the target requirements and had to withdraw (DTVCP, 2003).

In An Giang province, in stage 2, the region and province commanded to stay and mobilize the masses in My Duc, Khanh Hoa, Vinh Te, Da Phuoc areas. According to the plan, the provincial soldiers coordinated with guerrillas from Hong Ngu cross the Tien River through Long Son and Phu Lam. However, the main force of the area only reached Long Son and stood there for 3 days before withdrawing. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam mobilized 3 battalions and armored vehicles to intercept attacks in My Duc, Khanh Hoa. We resisted the raid for 3 days and nights, both sides suffered heavy losses. An Giang armed forces could not continue to hold on and had to withdraw to base B2. On the way out, a part of the group did not have time to cross the Vinh Te canal before dawn, encountered helicopter bombardment, and suffered some more casualties. In Tri Ton district, district soldiers and commune guerrillas also organized a number of sieges on military posts. A typical example is the siege of Cay Cay post and Bang Trao post on May 5, 1968, killing and injuring a number of local soldiers... On May 20, 1968, we attacked Ba The market (Hue Duc district) failed to win and had to withdraw their troops. This is also the ending battle of stage 2 in An Giang (AGVCP, 2007).

In August 1968, the Central Southern region entered the third stage of the attack. During this attack, it targeted a number of locations in My Tho, Ben Tre, Go Cong, Kien Tuong, of which Kien Tuong returned to Ben Tre is the priority direction of the main force of the region.

In Kien Tuong, the 504th Battalion followed Tan An town, along with the town's rangers corp unit attacked the security barracks, the pacification group, and the American commandos in Binh Tinh, killing and wounding over 50 soldiers. In the direction of Moc Hoa, soldiers and guerrillas blocked waterway traffic, forcing a brigade of the US 9th Infantry Division to move back to operate from Moc Hoa to Thu Thua. Coordinating with Tan An direction, the provincial soldiers and guerrillas actively operated in the areas of Binh Chau, Chua Noi, Cai Doi, dispersed forces, and launched deep raids into the center of Kien Tuong town. In September 1968, Battalion 504 intercepted and attacked a battalion of the 7th Infantry Division of the Republic of Vietnam in Binh Hiep, and the soldiers of Cai Doi post fled. On December 14, 1968, Battalion 504 coordinated with commandos to ambush at Hong Minh intersection (Binh Phong Thanh), destroying 2 boats and killing 80 soldiers. On December 28, 1968, we attacked a train running on the Vam Co River in Tuyen Binh (LAVCP, 2005).

In Ben Tre, the water commando company coordinated with battalion 516 to ambush, sink and burn 17 ships carrying the 3rd brigade and 9th US Infantry Division when raiding the Giong Trom base. On November 15, 1968, water commando shot down a boat and sank 15 ships at Ben Tre river estuary.

In My Tho, on the night of August 24, 1968, the main force of the area attacked the Giao Duc sub-zone. The infantry occupied the battlefield, but the coordinated mortar firing team mistakenly fired at our formation, causing heavy casualties, so they had to retreat. In Go Cong, Battalion 514B raided and destroyed a commando company at Ca Chot, raided Vam Giong post, and destroyed 2 vehicles on Hoa Dong Route (TGVCP, 2011).

3.3. Discuss some characteristics

Regarding to force preparation and organization work, it is not yet guaranteed for a large-scale general offensive. The process of preparing forces for the general offensive of the Central Southern region took place within only 1 month, under conditions of absolute secrecy, only the Standing Party Committee of the Region knew the plan of

the general offensive. At the remaining levels, units are only assigned the task of preparing for a major battle, without knowing the specific goals. Meanwhile, in all three attacks, the Central Southern region had to transfer a part of the main force to the regional army, so in fact, even though there was more mobilized, it was still very thin compared to the requirements of a large-scale attack. The preparation of forces and organization in an extremely difficult and rushed situation led to an unplanned and inconsistent attack time in all areas, even in key areas. On January 29, 1968, the Regional Party Committee issued an order of offensive, but the element of surprise was no longer there because on the night of January 30, 1968, several provinces in the Central region shooed, the Republic of Vietnam ordered a alert throughout the South. Right in the war zone, the specified time G is exactly 0 o'clock, all units will simultaneously shotted and attacked. However, at the My Tho key location, it took until 1 o'clock for the soldiers to fire the first artillery rounds – not to mention due to errors in transportation, artillery shells were not delivered in time, the plan was to fire 1,200 artillery shells but only fired 20 mortars 82. At Kien Tuong, due to the long march, it was not until 5:00 a.m that the attackers opened fire. In Kien Phong, the shooting time was at 4:00 a.m. February 1, 1968. In Go Cong, it was not until January 30, 1968 that the Provincial Party Committee Secretary received the order to attack and it was not until the morning of February 1, 1968 that the attack was organized.

Regarding the combat plan, in stage 1, ranges corp units and main forces attacked key locations in cities, towns, and townships, achieving initial results. After that, the coordination and cooperation process was not carried out as planned. In some areas, coordinated units did not arrive on time. In some areas, according to the plan, after the military attack takes control, the masses will be mobilized to rebel and take control, but when the military force takes over the battlefield, coordinated forces are not present to support. When the enemy counterattacked, resulting in great casualties. In the second stage, the element of surprise was no longer there, the military spearhead attacked the city from the active position but due to the thin force, it was not strong enough to occupy and master the battlefield. When faced with a strong counterattack, the attacks changed from an active position to a passive position, having to take a position of weakness, isolation, being surrounded, divided in the inner city and confronting the overwhelming strength of the Republic of Vietnam army. Therefore, when trying to hold cities and towns, the force suffered more casualties. Later on, the number of troops decreased. Immediately after the first stage, the area's forces (both regular army and guerrillas) were heavily depleted due to sticking to the outskirts and having to fight fierce counterattacks from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The number of troops decreased, the morale of officers and soldiers, and the belief in victory also decreased. In stage 2, some leaders of regions, provinces, and armed units proposed changing the campaign's attack direction. Instead of focusing our forces on cities and towns, we should arrange a part to stick to the suburbs to hold the enemy back, while the majority turn to liberate the countryside. The Standing Party Committee of the war zone 8 also found that the proposal was appropriate and proposed to the Regional Commander that instead of sending the 1st regiment to Long An, they would focus on attacking and liberating the Kien Tuong countryside. This proposal of the region was not approved by the Regional Command. The Standing Party Committee of the Region must continue to carry out the attack on My Tho city and its towns and cities. Most of the armed forces of the region, province, and district still had to stay in the suburbs to carry out attacks on the center, so they suffered many losses in the enemy's counterattacks.

The work of promoting ideology and preparing the masses is not good. Most of the people were not prepared in terms of ideology and organization, they did not understand what they would do during the general offensive and what the situation would be afterward. The goals, directions, and specific actions of the masses have not been clearly outlined and are not appropriate to the situation. In all three attacks on cities, towns, and townships, support from local popular forces for the uprising was very weak. This situation caused the enemy to recover from the initial shock and organize a very fierce counterattack. Especially after the second stage, the communes we liberated in the first stage were recaptured and even encroached deeply into the communes of the old liberated areas. By the end of 1968, our forces were weaker and weaker, taking advantage of that opportunity, the Republic of Vietnam launched the "speedy pacification" program, making the situation even more serious.

5. Conclusion

The gunfire of general offensive and uprising during the Tet Mau Than in the delta provinces of the Central Southern region broke out at 1:00 a.m. on August 31, 1968 and lasted throughout 1968, going through three stages. Right from the first stage, the entire region concentrated its forces on two key areas: My Tho city, Ben Tre town and most towns. As a result, we have not been able to completely destroy any cities, towns, or towns, but we have liberated more than 21 communes. In stage 2 and stage 3, the entire region continued to carry out a number of attacks on important key locations of the army and the clamping apparatus of the government of the Republic of Vietnam. In all three stages, the Central Southern region did not have battles that turned the situation around as required, tasks, and goals of the general offensive set out, but they significantly depleted the enemy's forces, causing experienced shocking situations in the ranks, contributing to the overall victory of the entire region, creating a glorious victory for the army and people of the South in the resistance war against America for national salvation. Through the developments of the Mau Than general offensive and uprising in the Central Southern region, it is possible to point out a number of characteristics that can contribute to the theoretical and practical summary of this important historical event.

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