

(~~TS-6-1~~) Despite the confidence of military commanders that the Marine base could be held, there was considerable anxiety in Washington. In late January, General Westmoreland had warned that if the situation near the DMZ and at Khe Sanh worsened drastically, nuclear or chemical weapons might have to be used. This prompted General McConnell to press, although unsuccessfully, for JCS authority to request Pacific Command (PACOM) to prepare a plan for using low-yield nuclear weapons to prevent a catastrophic loss of the Marine base.<sup>6</sup>

(~~TS-6-1~~) 1) At the White House the President made clear he did not wish to risk a defeat such as suffered by the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Replying to a query from the President, General Wheeler assured him on 3 February that the military situation at Khe Sanh differed from that of the French in three ways: the United States had more and better equipped reconnaissance, all-weather, fighter, and other tactical aircraft, plus B-52 bombers; there was reinforcing artillery from Marine positions east of the mountains; and there were vastly improved aerial techniques for resupply, medical evacuation, and for other needs.<sup>7</sup>

(~~TS-6-1~~) 3) Official and public concern heightened when Communist forces overran the Special Forces camp at Long Vei near Khe Sanh on 6-7 February. This loss, accompanied by other temporary setbacks inflicted by the enemy's Tet offensive, raised probing Congressional inquiries about the war, evoked more criticism from the press, and led commanders in Saigon to request urgent reinforcements from the United States.<sup>8</sup>

(~~TS-6-1~~) Meanwhile, additional air power was brought to bear on Communist forces at Khe Sanh and related targets in South Vietnam and Laos. On 11 February the Joint Chiefs authorized the SAC and PACOM commanders to use the newly arrived Port Bow B-52's at Guam and Okinawa for these strikes. They also permitted an increase in the overall B-52 Arc Light sortie rate from 1,200 per month (originally scheduled to be attained by 1 February) to 1,800 per month.<sup>9</sup>

(~~TS-6-1~~) 3) In mid-February another change in policy--long sought by the Air Force and other services--aided the defenders of Khe Sanh and other allied positions under attack by the Communists. It involved terminating the restriction, imposed by the Thai government in March 1965, on using Thai-based tactical aircraft for