

## AN LOC – THE BATTLE THAT SAVED SAIGON

**THIET GIAP!**

In early 1972 the military situation was deteriorating from a South Vietnamese perspective. Their longstanding ally the United States was reducing its commitment to the conflict and starting to pull out their ground forces while maintaining support from the air and in military equipment. As a result, the ARVN units were being deployed in the various military districts with defined responsibilities – invariably these focused on defending an area and keeping highways open.

By Eoghan Kelly

**R**unning north from Saigon and across the border into Cambodia was Highway 13; control of it allowed the South to move forces effectively in and out of the capital. The North recognised cutting it would starve forward bases from interfering with their troop movements into South Vietnam from Cambodia. At An Loc, the South had a long-established firebase sitting astride the highway, with several more dominating the surrounding countryside. To the east lay the infamous Iron Triangle, which ARVN units routinely conducted sweeps through with varying degrees of success.

With reinforcements needed elsewhere, Bình Phước Province was only defended by the ARVN Fifth Infantry Division, the bulk of which occupied the defensive perimeter of An Loc. Seen by

many as an effective fighting force, in reality it had deteriorated rapidly under the inept leadership of several poor commanders (General Thuan, forced out in 1969; Major General Nguyen Văn Hieu who almost caused a mutiny after Snoul). The new commander was Colonel Lê Văn Hung – the only officer the US had said would be worse than Hieu.

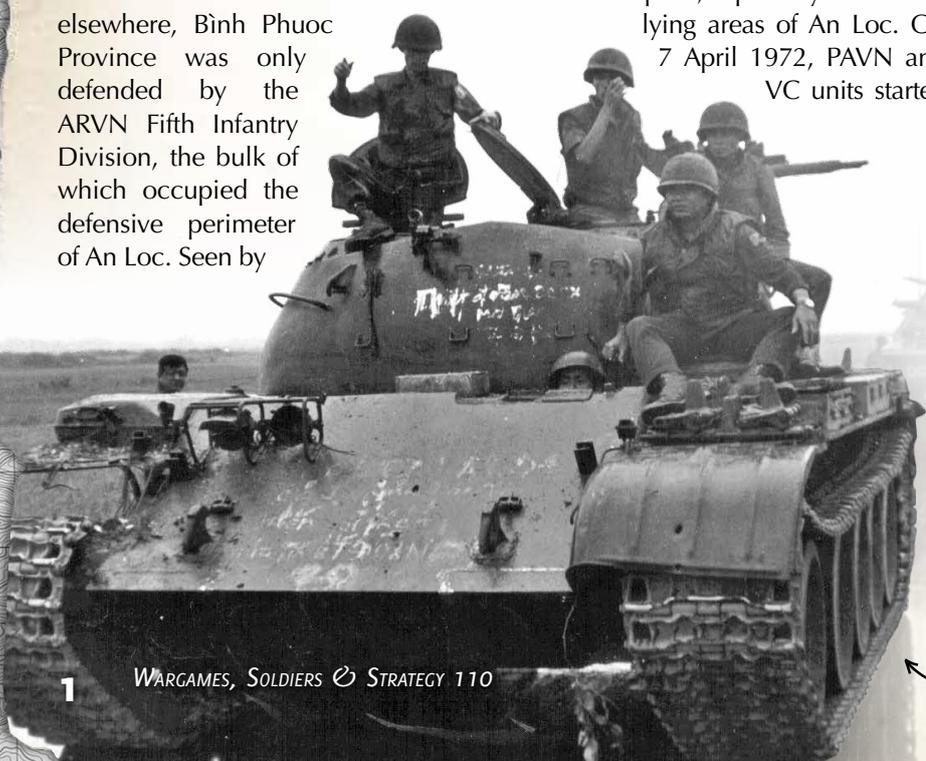
The Communist intelligence networks couldn't fail to pick up on how the Fifth Division were performing as they drew their plans for the Easter Offensive of 1972 (the Nguyen Hue Offensive). Although it was widely expected, the initial moves of the offensive still caused surprise, especially in the outlying areas of An Loc. On 7 April 1972, PAVN and VC units started

to move against An Loc – elements of the PAVN Ninth Division overran part of Quan Loi Base Camp (aka LZ Andy or Rocket City) 6 km east of An Loc. This drove back the defenders, but not before they had destroyed their 105 mm and 155 mm artillery pieces. In the early hours of 8 April, the camp at Loc Ninh (20 km north of An Loc) was also overrun by elements of the PAVN Fifth Division. At the same time, the firebase north of An Loc called TF52 was also destroyed, this time by parts of the PAVN Seventh Division, following dithering by the ARVN commander. It was clear to the Southern command and their US advisors that there were at least three NVA divisions gradually surrounding their base, and reports came in that other elements of the PAVN Fifth Division had now cut Highway QL-13. An Loc was now cut off from any overland support.

PAVN forces attacked the north-eastern perimeter of An Loc on the morning of the 13th, commencing the assault with a heavy artillery barrage. The North Vietnamese forces outnumbered the defenders by more than three to one, with some battle-hardened units leading the assault, and, unusually for this type of assault, the PAVN led the assault with an armoured attack.

For the men of the Fifth, their day of reckoning had arrived.

↖ Outside of Dong Ha, members of the South Vietnamese 20th Tank Regiment ride on a T-59 they have captured from the North Vietnamese.  
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ARVN infantry move through the outskirts of a village, while Walker Bulldogs provide cover and fire support.

## PLAYING AN LOC

This is designed as a mini campaign for *Flames of War 'NAM* to be played at whatever scale the players wish. This could be fought as a series of 6mm battles or by reducing the forces played at larger scales (15mm or 28mm).

The game starts at 0600 and is in one-hour turns until 1800 for each day. The game ends on day four at 1200 if there are still ARVN units on the map. The weather is hot and dry and will not affect the campaign.

### Special rules

**Night:** Unusually for them, the PAVN units were not accomplished night

fighters. As a result, they must withdraw to a cohesive line once the day ends – units are not allowed to be isolated at the end of a day. For a cohesive line to be held there must be units ‘anchoring’ each end of a line to a geographic feature. There is a minimum of two units required to form a line.

ARVN units do not have to withdraw to a line at night, but any units that wish to move or change positions may do so automatically at night.

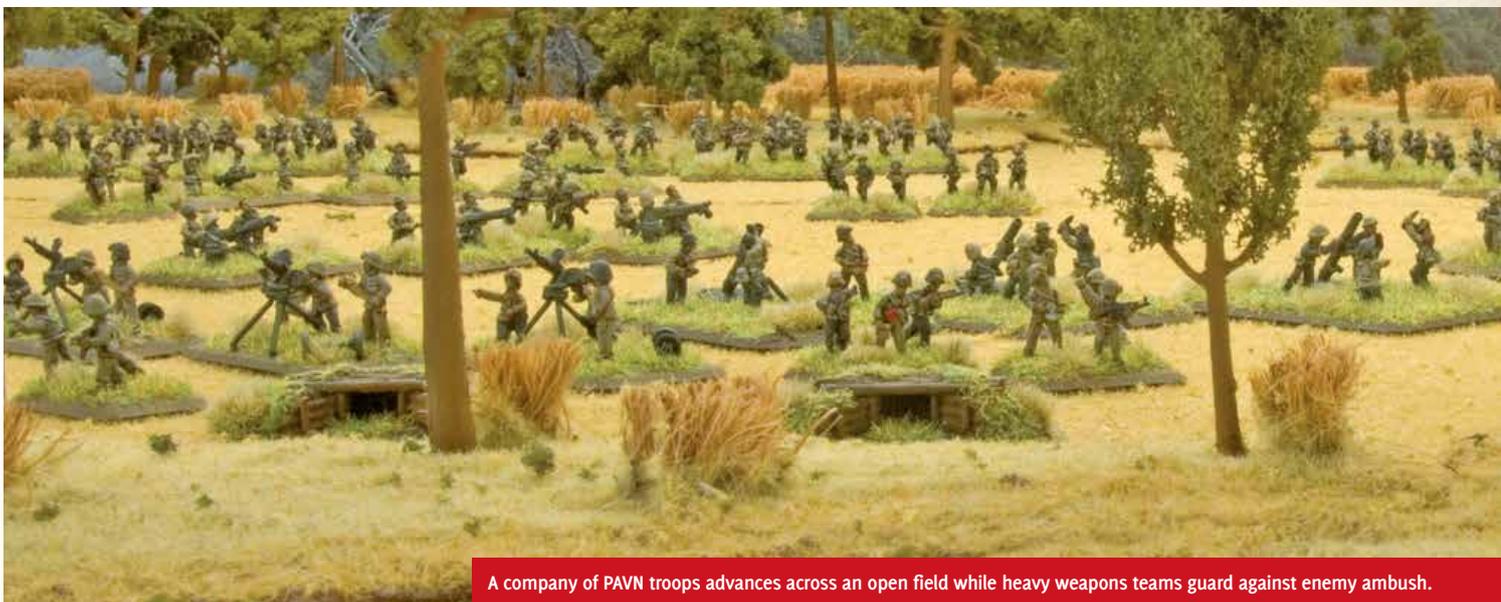
**Villages/hamlets:** The buildings provide ‘LOS’ cover and provide a very basic level of protection, but that is all. They are wood and bamboo constructs and are flammable.

**Game end:** The game ends when one side is driven off the map or 1200 arrives on Day 4. The PAVN/VC win if they manage to exit armoured units off the southern edge of the map and there are no cohesive ARVN units left on the map. ARVN will win in any other result.

## SOUTH VIETNAMESE DEPLOYMENT

The following units deploy on the map anywhere inside the ARVN front line. Any unit can start ‘dug in’ in prepared positions. All towns and hamlets also have prepared positions in them.

- Seventh Regiment – 850 men (2 x half-strength companies).



A company of PAVN troops advances across an open field while heavy weapons teams guard against enemy ambush.



**Leaders:** All ARVN leaders of companies are considered to be of good quality due to US advisors placed with them.

**Discipline:** Units are disciplined. They will retire one (or more) full moves (only stop when they find cover) when they fail a morale test; they will automatically rally once cover is achieved. Exception: The ARVN Ranger unit is not disciplined. The quality of the Rangers had deteriorated significantly since 1968 and many units (the Third included) were now recruiting from deserters and convicts.

**Binh Long local knowledge:** Due to their familiarity with the local terrain and geography, any unit moving with a Binh Long unit can ignore any negative terrain effects.

**Hunter killers:** Due to their ability to use terrain, any concealed ARVN unit placed with a Binh Long Unit (including a Binh Long unit placed on its own) is never revealed or discovered unless the player chooses to do so. This ability cannot be applied if the unit moves at all during this turn.

**Tank fear:** It was very rare for the ARVN to encounter PAVN armoured units – and they were an unpleasant surprise. Any ARVN unit that encounters a tank for the first time must make a morale check (with no adjustments). If they fail, then the discipline result will be in effect. If they pass, then there is no further testing for that unit. If a unit fails this twice,

Morale: good; training: good.

- Eighth Regiment – 2,100 men (4 x companies). Morale: good; training: good.
- Ninth Regiment – 200 men (1 x half-company). Morale: low; training: good.
- Third Ranger Group – 600 men (1 x company). Morale: good; training: good.
- Binh Long Provincial Forces – 600 men (3 x half-strength companies). Morale: excellent; training: poor.

Each rifle company comprises three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon (consisting of two M40 recoilless rifles, two 81 mm mortars, and two M60 machine guns). Each rifle platoon consists of a five-man HQ with radio and

medic, and three ten-man squads with M16s and an M79 grenade launcher.

Two of the companies can be equipped with M113s, the rest have trucks for transport.

**Offboard support:** There can be one call per turn for air support. This can only be used on open spaces and only at one location. The support is in the form of AC-130 or AC-119 gunships or a Bell Huey Cobra. On day two this is increased to two gunships every third turn. On day three, the ARVN forces may also call in two B-52 strikes in the course of the game. These will run a line of hits across the board in a straight line starting from the point they are called in and always to the edge of the board. They will always run away from the bottom right corner of the board.





North Vietnamese soldiers surprise an advancing ARVN column, firing rockets at the accompanying tanks.

they will not need to test again. Binh Long units do not test for this.

**Lots of missiles:** The bases were well supplied with M72 LAW rockets. After turn 3, all ARVN units will be considered to have opened boxes/ received supplies etc.

### NORTH VIETNAMESE DEPLOYMENT

The following units deploy on any map edge outside the ARVN front line (clockwise from Tran Hung Dao to Nui Tung).

- 271st Regiment – 2,000 men (4 x companies). Morale: good; training: good.
- 272nd Regiment – 2,000 men (4 x companies). Morale: good; training: good.

- 95th Regiment – 2,000 men (4 x companies). Morale: good; training: poor.

The following units advance onto the map after day 1:

- 203rd PAVN Tank Regiment First Company – 9 x T-54 (advance down Route 361 from the north-east corner). Morale: excellent; training: poor.
- 203rd PAVN Tank Regiment Second Company – 9 x T-54 (advance down Highway QL-20 from the north-west corner). Morale: excellent; training: poor.
- 429th Sapper Group – 320 men (1 x half-strength company). Morale: excellent; training: excellent.

Each PAVN infantry regiment consists of three infantry companies (each of three platoons and a company HQ of six men) and one weapons company (consisting of three machine gun platoons either of three MMGs or three DShK HMGs, three mortar platoons of three 81 mm mortars, and a weapons platoon of three B-10 recoilless rifles).

Each PAVN platoon consists of a three-man HQ, a weapons section of two 60 mm mortars and two light machine guns, and three infantry sections of nine men equipped with an RPG-7 launcher and an LMG.



North Vietnamese soldiers overrun an ARVN airbase, destroying all the helicopters which didn't escape in time.



Both sides arrive in central An Loc and engage in brutal street fighting in order to gain control of the strategic town.

Two of the PAVN companies may have armoured transports (BTR 50 or BTR60P). The rest are on foot.

**Offboard support:** Each turn, the PAVN player may try to call on off-board artillery. The player rolls 1D6. On a 5 or 6 they have artillery available. Roll another 1D6 and on a 1, 2, or 3 it is a battery of 57 mm, on a 4 it is a battery of 76 mm, on a 5 it is a 107 mm battery, and on a 6 it is a 120 mm mortar battery.

**Leaders:** Infantry leaders are considered poor – the Ninth Division had a disproportionate number of poor officers. All other leaders are average.

**Doctrine:** The PAVN used human wave assaults during most of their offensives. Any attack on an ARVN position must be attempted as a close-combat assault.

PAVN doctrine made little attempt to differentiate between infantry or armoured units when it came to attacks – and armoured units tended to drive as fast as possible at enemy units. There must be at least one company assigned to the armour to act as support. Once the armour has left them behind, they may stop acting as support. Armoured units must move the maximum they can in every turn whilst maintaining unit cohesion. Armoured units may not deliberately use cover when moving.

**Endless reinforcements:** This was a major effort by the North Vietnamese and capturing An Loc would open Saigon up to

capture. As a result, casualties were replaced as fast as they could be brought forward. Any infantry company that is eliminated is replaced the next morning with a new unit that must march onto the board. The morale and training of the replacement unit will be one level worse than the unit they replace. A replacement unit itself cannot be replaced.

**Anti-aircraft:** The PAVN units brought an enormous amount of AA units with them to try to counter the destructive low-level arsenal the US could deploy. Every time the ARVN player calls in a gunship, the PAVN player rolls a D6, and on a 6 the fire from the ground puts off the attack run – any other result and the attack can progress as normal.

## AFTERMATH

This was part of a wider attack on the northern perimeter of An Loc. The as-

sault by the Ninth Division was intended to drive into the centre of An Loc as fast as possible to create as much confusion as possible. The efforts of the Fifth Division defied expectations and they fought the PAVN forces to a standstill (albeit by conceding a lot of ground) by the start of 16 April. As a result, the commander of the Ninth was censured and overall command was given to the commander of the Fifth PAVN Division. Once this had happened, the PAVN forces settled down to a 66-day siege that saw US airpower carry the balance of power and ultimately defeat the offensive. A US report afterwards described it as the most significant battle of the war.

South Vietnam would exist for two more years... **WS&S**

**'Thiet giap' is the Vietnamese cry when a tank is in the area!**



Tanks supporting the ARVN forces are overwhelmed by the bold tactics employed by the PAVN T55s.

