

NSC BRIEFING

18 March 1954

CONDITIONS AT DIEN BIEN PHU

- I. Garrison on plain 25 mi. long and 4 wide, surrounded by high hills.
 - A. French, Foreign Legion, African, Viet, and tribal troops.
 - B. Artillery in center positions.
 - C. Enemy targets obscured by haze.
- II. Attacks come in suicidal waves.
 - A. Viet Minh bodies on barbed wire obstruct line of fire.
 - B. Enemy troops act as living bombs.
 - C. Their morale high.
- III. Viet Minh artillery deadly.
 - A. Both airstrips unusable.
 - B. French gun crews knocked out.
 - C. Firing shows thorough training.
 - D. Effective use of artillery without prior experience suggests possible presence Chinese.

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- E. Enemy well informed on French defenses.
- IV. French admit losing 2 battalions.
 - A. Casualties await helicopter evacuation: only one plane in since Sunday.
- V. Morale bad; artillery barrage something new and unnerving.
 - A. Tribal units proving unreliable.
- VI. French can airdrop for 60 days with chutes on hand.
 - A. Enemy has supplies for equal period.
 - B. Enemy AA worrying French.
 - 1. Eight planes destroyed, mostly on ground.
 - 2. Viet Minh may have about six 37mm pieces; rely mostly on 12.7 machine guns.

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- VII. Navarre says he'll hold at all costs.
- A. His staff appalled at
devastating first phase.
 - B. Remaining paratroop bns.
(6) will be used if necessary.
 - C. Outcome is touch-and-go, per-
haps slight French advantage.
 - D. French must increase air
action, lift morale.
- VIII. Hanoi consulate has evacuation plans
ready in unlikely case of emergency.

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