

A Close-Range Red Shelling Of Saigon Area

SF Chronicle
Saigon

Viet Cong gunners firing from as close as eight miles outside the center of Saigon hit a suburb of the capital early today in the first shelling of the Saigon area in the Communists' current offensive.

Far to the northeast, South Vietnamese troops striking back reoccupied the coastal city of Nha Trang yesterday.

Other government military units and police began boarding refugee ships and killing suspected Communist agents on the spot, an American witness said.

The South Vietnamese military command said the Communists hit Nha Be, six miles southeast of the center of Saigon, with recoilless rifle and mortar fire, which has a maximum range of about two miles.

Spokesmen said six persons were wounded in the two-hour bombardment of about 60 shells.

Today's shelling of Nha Be, site of South Vietnam's largest oil storage facility, was the first attack on the capital area since the beginning of the current North Vietnamese and Viet Cong drive.

Heavy fighting was reported yesterday near Binh Phuoc district capital, 26 miles south of Saigon, spokesmen said. They said 18 Communists and three Saigon government soldiers were killed in the fighting and six South Vietnamese soldiers were wounded.

The South Vietnamese forces return to Nha Trang, 188 miles northeast of Saigon, was the first major move by the Saigon government to take back territory lost to the Communists.

Cargo planes softened up North Vietnamese-held areas around Nha Trang by dropping 15,000 anti-personnel bombs.

An American witness said South Vietnamese troops and police were carrying out what the military called "discriminate elimination" of suspected Communist agents aboard evacuation ships unloading thousands of refugees on Phu Quoc island, 60 miles off the southwest coast in the Gulf of Thailand.

Those who did not pass muster were shot on the spot

United Press