

For 10,000 Bound for Saigon, an Interrupted Journey

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

Special to The New York Times

GO DEN, South Vietnam, April 9—For some Vietnamese, the war just means sitting and waiting in the hot sun.

More than 10,000 people did that here today when Communist troops cut Route 4, the main road from the populous Mekong Delta to Saigon, and stopped traffic for miles.

There was no sound of gunfire and no artillery shells landed nearby. No one could see the Communists, who were an unknown number of miles farther down the road. The biggest enemy was boredom and the heat.

Growing Sense of Fear

The scene was familiar enough for the Vietnamese, accustomed for years to Communist ambushes and roadblocks. But today's tie-up was particularly serious because this village, where the lead vehicle was stopped, is only 15 miles south of Saigon.

The cutting of Route 4 here has a dual effect—it in-

creases the sense of fear in Saigon and it blocks the capital from its major source of rice, vegetables and fruit in the Delta. The Communists have previously cut the highways leading to Saigon from the east and north.

For some of the people in the hundreds of buses stuck here today, it was also painfully frustrating.

A short stocky paratrooper in mottled-green camouflage uniform paced up and down the endless column of red, green, blue and silver buses. One arm was in a sling, the other bore a red gash from wrist to elbow.

"I have a two-day leave to go home to visit my family," the paratrooper said. "Our battalion just got evacuated back to Saigon, now I won't have much time at home."

Reds 'Not So Tough'

The deeply tanned soldier, who wore his elite division's red beret and parachute insignia, was wounded last week in fighting near Nha Trang on the central coast.

"We were advancing, not retreating, we could have ad-

vanced all the way to Ban Me Thuot," he said proudly, referring to a city in the Central Highlands captured by the North Vietnamese. "The Communists were not so tough, even though they shelled us all the time with 105's they captured from the infantry."

"But then everyone behind us ran away, so we had to pull back ourselves," he added with disgust.

A Few Are Happy

Small boys moved along the buses, cars and trucks selling popsicles and slices of watermelon. The boys and a few old women who quickly arrived from Go Den village to sell soft drinks were the only happy people here today. For them the roadblock meant a few extra piasters.

Some passengers remained in the stiflingly hot buses, but most sought shade either under the vehicles or under a mango or banana tree in the nearby rice paddies, parched brown by the tropical sun. A few squatted behind a

roadside billboard advertising powdered milk for babies.

No one seemed to know what was happening up ahead, or how long they would have to wait. By noon many had already been held up for five hours. (Traffic finally did begin to move after 2 P.M., when Government troops cleared the Communists from the road near Tan An, the capital of Long An Province.)

A militia lieutenant who had been ordered to stop any vehicles from going farther and getting shot at by the Communists sat on a large white tombstone.

"I heard over my radio that the Communists are shelling Tan An," he said when asked what had happened. But no one tells me anything."

Three young soldiers under his command leaned on their M-16 rifles, paying little attention to the blocked traffic or to possible Communists lurking in the rice fields.

"We don't know anything," one commented. It was another typical day in the war for Vietnam.

* SEE SF CHRONICLE, SAME STORY,
LAST TWO PARAGRAPHS.