

U.S. Correspondent's Report

San Francisco Chronicle 15
★ Thurs., May 8, 1975

How the Reds Took Over Saigon

This is the first communication UPI has received from its correspondents in Saigon since April 30. It came in the form of a cable filed by UPI Saigon bureau manager Alan Dawson.

By Alan Dawson
United Press

Saigon

The Communist takeover of Saigon went smoothly with a well planned military and political operation that seized control within hours of surrender by the previous government.

Isolated shooting incidents broke out in the capital last Wednesday (April 30) as suicide holdouts fired at Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers at the presidential palace, the zoo and a number of suburban areas.

The Communists hit Saigon the last day of the war from three major sides — the north, the southwest and through Tan Son Nhut air base on the northwest.

By early morning, they had overrun a police station, suburban precinct No. 9, taken control of the borders of Tran Son Nhut and fought their way into Phu Lam and Phu Tho districts on the capital's southwest.

Retreating South Vietnamese set up a last defensive line at the northern end of Tan Son Nhut, but senior commanders fled and the line broke.

The victorious Communists entered with a tremendous display of potential firepower that awed the most jaded observers of the Vietnam war.

Tanks, armored personnel carriers and trucks drove through the streets.

Communist forces moved

quickly to pre-assigned positions, wheeled out the firepower and prepared for a final battle if necessary.

At the presidential palace, a battle broke out at 4:30 p.m. the first day. But out-gunned South Vietnamese troops quickly succumbed to the massive firepower of the Communists.

After that, Saigon was quiet.

The first day of peace in Vietnam in 30 years dawned on May Day.

Security in the city has been more or less on the honor system since then, with only the threat of rumored swift curbside justice by Communist forces holding back looting and hoodliganism.

A week after the takeover there was still no police force for Saigon and many thousands of soldiers who wandered or patrolled the streets in the first days of the takeover had moved back outside the city.

There also was no permanent government for the Republic of South Vietnam, the new name for this nation that was called the Republic of Vietnam until its capture by the Communists.

Members of the Provisional Revolutionary Government — the Viet Cong — had not arrived in the capital and there was no word when to expect them.

There were no reported Viet Cong reprisals, and life in Saigon returned to normal within 48 hours of the takeover.

There were, of course brand new scenes for the population — Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldier shopping in the still-open black market, stocked now

with looted material from the American PX; open highways to the Mekong delta; Communist soldiers and civilians chatting amiably.

Saigon continued in many ways to be the wide-open city it has during the past 30 years of warfare.

Black markets continued to flourish, dealing now with American, South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese currencies. No banks had opened a week after the takeover, spurring the money black market even more.

A senior Chinese businessman, Tran Thanh, a millionaire from the sale of monosodium glutamate, turned out to be a Communist sympathizer and stayed behind in Saigon's twin city of Cholon after most of his associates fled with their cash.

But no important members of the previous pro-American governments had emerged as pro Communist in the new temporary administration.

Viet Cong directives put civil servants back on their previous jobs, although Communists now hold the major positions.

United Press