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Matter of Fact



The Success of Vietnamization

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BATTLES being battles, it is always folly to forecast the outcome until the last shot has been fired. In the hope of getting a better notion of the climactic battles of the Vietnamese war, I will shortly be going there.

By any test, however, it is already time to say that the events of the last few days have proven the triumphant success of President Nixon's Vietnamization program. Vietnamization's success, of course, may not be enough to prevent the South Vietnamese army's defeat. But for the North Vietnamese invaders, Vietnamization's success is already proving a dramatically heavy handicap.

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THIS LESSON is clear. Let us start with an astonishing fight that took place in a little hamlet south of Quang Tri city on April 5.

The hamlet was infiltrated by a full strength company of North Vietnamese sappers. They managed to dig itself into good defensive positions. Their mission was to cut Highway One — the old "street without joy."

The presence in the hamlet of the intruding North Vietnamese sapper company was promptly reported to the local militia. They at once moved out to take on the enemy sapper company.

No regular South Vietnamese troops were called in to give aid. A couple of helicopter gunships supported the men of the regional forces; and they also had

grenade launchers to strike at the sapper company's emplacements. In the end, some 60 North Vietnamese sappers had been killed and a young boy had surrendered. So the story ended. But remember, the militia did the whole job.

You can see, then, why the Vietnamization program must now be counted a remarkable success: however the fighting comes out between the South and North Vietnamese armies. The little thing, above-described, leads on directly to the big thing. The big thing is the simple fact that the North Vietnamese army is now carrying the burden almost alone.

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AT TET, in 1968, the point battalions in all the attacks on all the cities and towns of South Vietnam, were Viet Cong battalions rather than North Vietnamese battalions. In that fighting, in truth, the native Viet Cong of South Vietnam carried the main burden.

This time, instead, Hanoi has repeatedly sent frenzied, even shrill commands to the Viet Cong leaders in the provinces to "get with the program." But the Viet Cong in the provinces, so far as they still survive, have in most cases ignored or defied Hanoi's orders.

In sum, Vietnamization's success has been proven by the vigorous and tough reaction of the South Vietnamese militia units. But that much being said, the all important outcome of the main battles must still be awaited.