

Reds Threaten Second City in South Vietnam

Saigon

North Vietnamese forces widened their territorial control yesterday in fighting less than 100 miles from Saigon.

They threatened a second provincial capital after capturing Phuoc Binh, 75 miles north of Saigon, the first to fall in nearly three years.

The provincial capital of Tay Ninh was menaced after North Vietnamese forces captured the Black Virgin Mountain base camp and communications center 70 miles southwest of Phuoc Binh.

The North Vietnamese troops damaged most of the signal equipment in the camp and forced 100 defenders to flee, the Saigon command said. The camp is on the northeastern approaches to Tay Ninh City, about 60 miles northwest of Saigon.

President Nguyen Van Thieu announced a three-day mourning period for the loss of Phuoc Binh. All places of entertainment were ordered closed.

Thieu acknowledged that the capture of the city completed the Communists' conquest of Phuoc Long province.

South Vietnamese government soundtrucks roamed Saigon streets urging people to pass up entertainment and donate money instead of victims of the Phuoc Long fighting.

One hundred persons protested against the attacks at Phuoc Binh in a demonstration at the headquarters of the four-nation International Commission of Control and Supervision in Saigon. It was the second such protest in two days.

The South Vietnamese National Assembly issued a declaration denouncing North Vietnam. It also appealed to the United Nations and the 12 signers of the international conference on Vietnam, which include the United States, China and the Soviet Union, to intervene to stop the "aggressive acts of the Communists" against South Vietnam.

Appeals also were made to the International Red Cross, the World Health Organization and the United Nations, calling on them to force North Vietnam to return South Vietnamese soldiers and civilians who do not wish to live in Communist zones to areas under the control of the Saigon government.

Another appeal was made to the United States to give full aid to South Vietnam.

In a statement read by announcers on the South Vietnamese government radio

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and television network, Thieu declared:

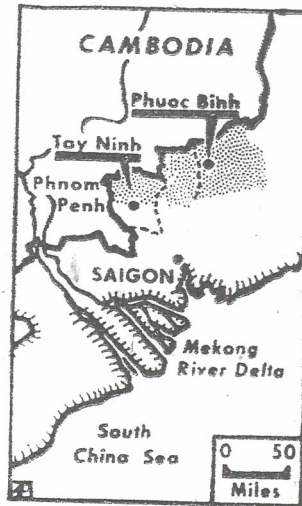
"This morning, January 7, our Phuoc Binh provincial capital has been overrun after 25 days of valiant fighting by our soldiers and people with difficult and harsh conditions to resist against the North Vietnamese Seventh Division, supported by artillery, antiaircraft, rockets, tanks and sappers that outnumbered our force.

"But the North Vietnamese have paid a costly price . . . In order to acknowledge the noble sacrifice of our soldiers, cadres and people who have died for the nation . . . I appeal to the entire population to reserve three days from January 8 to pray and hold memorial services for them and avoid all luxury distractions and to stop all entertainment. Those three days will reveal our wholehearted unanimity for the determination of the entire South Vietnamese people against the Communist aggressors."

The only foreigners known to be in Phuoc Binh were two missionary nuns from New Zealand. They refused to be evacuated.

Phuoc Binh was the second of South Vietnam's 44 provincial capitals to be lost to the Communists during the war. The first to fall was Quang Tri City, capital of the country's northernmost province, during the North Vietnamese 1972 Easter offensive. The city was recaptured four months later, but the North Vietnamese still hold most of the northern and western part of the province, including several district capitals.

The fall of Phuoc Long province gives the North Vietnamese control of much of three provinces that form an arc from Tay Ninh northwest of Saigon to Phuoc Long on the northeast. In



AP Wirephoto

Sites of North Vietnamese advances in South Vietnam

the middle lies Binh Long province. Although the South Vietnamese hold the provincial capital cities of Tay Ninh and An Loc in Binh Long, the North Vietnamese control half or more of the territory in these two provinces.

Phuoc Long is strategic in that it lies near North Vietnamese base camps along the Cambodian border and now gives the Communists control of major north-south highways running through South Vietnam.

Analysts said its fall does not pose any immediate threat to Saigon, but should Hanoi decide to launch an all-out offensive, the province gives the North Vietnamese an advantageous battle position.

Associated Press