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## Hue Pullback Would Involve a Historic Region

The abandonment by the Saigon Government of the former imperial capital of Hue would reflect the seriousness of President Nguyen Van Thieu's position.

If Saigon is the center of the Thieu Government's nervous system, Hue with its royal citadel and tombs, rich Buddhist heritage, gracious streets and the Huong (Perfume) River, is the country's soul.

The reported imminent abandonment of South Vietnam's two northernmost provinces, Quang Tri and Thau Thien, in the latest phase of a sudden pullback, would also give the Vietnamese Communists some historic battlegrounds where Americans served and died—Khe Sanh, Phu Bai and Quang Tri City.

The withdrawal, furthermore, would put Da Nang, South Vietnam's second largest city, with 400,000 inhabitants, on the front lines.

Hue, the principal city of Thua Thien, with a normal population of 200,000, has long been a sanctified place to the Vietnamese.

Following a dynastic division in the 16th century, Hue became the capital of the Nguyen dynasty while the royal Le line ruled from Hanoi, in 1802, all Vietnam was reunited under Hue until the French seized control of the country in the eighteen-eighties.

### A City of Shrines

Hue has been a city of poets and shrines, a place where Tu Cung, the 87-year-old queen mother, lives out her last days dreaming of her exiled son, Bao Dai, Vietnam's last emperor; where, in the midst of war in 1972, Ung Tuong, the museum curator, carefully evacuated the national treasures; and where, for \$8, a visitor might hire a sampan and

be served dinner while floating gently down the river in the tropical night.

Hue is also a place that burned itself into the world's consciousness with the massacre of 2,700 citizens by Communist forces who seized the city during the Tet offensive in 1968. American and South Vietnamese troops recaptured Hue after 26 days of door-to-door combat, during which much of the city was destroyed. It has since been rebuilt.

Quang Tri Province, which is apparently being abandoned, was once before overrun by Communist forces, in the spring of 1972. Quang Tri City was retaken that July, but B-52 strikes had reduced the city to rubble.

The Communist forces already occupy the northern part of Quang Tri Province, including the second largest town, Dong Ha, which they seized and held until their control was recognized by the 1973 cease-fire. Dongha became an initial center of the Vietcong government.

### Places Where G.I.'s Fought

Also in the region reportedly set for abandonment are places where Americans died defending.

¶Khe Sanh, in the jungle astride the Ho Chi Minh trail from Laos, where, for 77 days in the summer of 1968, 5,000 marines withstood a siege by up to 40,000 troops. About 300 Americans died and 2,200 were wounded.

¶Phu Bai, where on April 12, 1972, 50 G.I.'s briefly refused to obey an order to move out in one of the war's rare instances of military revolt.

¶Route 1 between Quang Tri and Hue, dubbed by the French "the Street Without Joy" for the savage fighting as they sought to secure the sandy lowlands from the Communist guerrillas. Later, the Americans gave the route their own name. They called it the "Avenue of Horror."