

3-20-75

NYT

# SAIGON IS PRESSED BY NEARBY ACTION

## Heavy Fighting With Hanoi Units Is Cited at 2 Points 40 and 50 Miles Away

By **BERNARD WEINRAUB**  
Special to The New York Times

XUAN LOC, South Vietnam, March 19—North Vietnamese and Saigon Government troops engaged in heavy fighting near here today less than 50 miles northeast of the South Vietnamese capital.

The action confronted the capital with a second threat. The other is a growing center of Communist activity in Tay Ninh province northwest of the city. Heavy fighting was reported there centering on Go Dau Ha, roughly 40 miles from Saigon.

In Xuan Loc, a bleak and tense city that is the capital of Long Khanh Province, soldiers gripping semiautomatic weapons rode through dusty downtown streets toward two district seats that were under sharp attack today.

The towns, Kien Tam and Dinh Quan, are on a key arterial highway to the capital. The artery, Route 20, linking Saigon to the fertile hill resort of Da Lat, remained cut today for the third day.

The Da Lat area is a major supplier of vegetables and fruits in Saigon, and there were some reports today of shortages in Saigon markets.

"People are worried about another Ban Me Thuot," a South Vietnamese master sergeant here said, referring to the Central Highlands city that fell last week to the Communists. He added: "People are leaving for Saigon. People are scared. No one wants to be trapped. No one knows what will happen."

### 'They Come Every Night Now'

A farmer said of the North Vietnamese: "They come every night now. We hear them. They want to do here what they did in the highlands."

Over the last few days the South Vietnamese Government decided to abandon most of the highlands provinces of Kontom,

Pigiku and Dariac in the face of Communist assaults.

Today hundreds of refugees were fleeing from the two towns near here and from Gia Ray, 10 miles east of here. Gia Ray is near Route 1, another key road that leads to the capital.

The fighting here in Long Khanh Province now poses an increased threat to Saigon's control of the adjoining province to the east, Binh Tuy. There a district capital, Tanh Linh, fell to the Communists before Christmas.

The pressure on the eastern corridor leading to Saigon is coupled with heavy fighting northwest of the capital in Tay Ninh Province, where Government troops are reported retaining only a tenuous grip on the provincial capital, also known as Tay Ninh. That city is 65 miles northwest of Saigon.

Today the Saigon Government said that heavy fighting continued in the province, centering on another key highway, Route 22, as well as on the district capital Go Dau Ha.

### Control of Roads Shifts

At this stage, in the aftermath of sharp North Vietnamese assaults throughout the country, all the major highways leading to Saigon have been reported cut except Route 4, the crucial route that carries rice from the Mekong Delta in the south to the capital. Some of the highways, however, are not permanently severed and shift from one side to the other.

Military officials here are clearly frightened about the apparently worsening military situation in Long Khanh. There are believed to be at least two North Vietnamese divisions—the 33d and the 6th—in the province, totaling about 25,000 men. In addition, one source said, there were indications that North Vietnamese troops were moving in from Binh Tuy Province and from Phuoc Long, which fell last January to the Communists.

The Saigon Government troops defending the province are of the 18th Division, one of the nation's best. There were some reports that President Nguyen Van Thieu had ordered the nation's paratroop division from Da Nang to Saigon to help cope with the mounting drives in surrounding provinces, and some of these paratroops may be shifted to Long Khanh.

Xuan Loc itself, 47 miles from Saigon, echoed through the sweltering day with the sound of artillery and distant gunfire. Visitors were warned not to leave the city, and Route 1 outside Xuan Loc was eerily empty except for trucks carrying troops to Kien Tam and Dinh Quan.

A 17 year old farmer, Nguyen Vana Hung, said nervously of the North Vietnamese: "They come and say they are here to liberate us. They come at night. Two nights ago they came and I was so scared I took my sack with my camera and I hid. I thought they would take me. My father spoke to them. He gave them some money and they left."