

# South Viet Army

## Abandons Hue

### Saigon

South Vietnamese troops pulled out of Hue today, leaving the old imperial capital and its walled palace courtyards to the advancing North Vietnamese, Western diplomats reported.

Farther south, Communist-led forces captured two provincial capitals and drove through to the China Sea, cutting off the northern quarter of South Vietnam from the rest of the country.

Da Nang, a port city where U.S. Marines first landed ten years ago, is now isolated and accessible only

by sea or air.

The diplomats said government units began withdrawing from Hue last night, boarding boats for escape down the Perfume River to the sea. Most of the city's 200,000 residents had fled earlier heading southward for Da Nang.

About 20,000 South Vietnamese troops—the equivalent of two divisions of the best forces in the South Vietnamese army—were in Hue when generals ordered it abandoned, the diplomats said.

In Saigon, an opposition group urged President Nguyen Van Thieu to resign because of the deteriorating military situation. It was the first such call since the North Vietnamese offensive began earlier this month and the first time the largely Buddhist group cited military reasons for Thieu to quit.

Da Nang is South Vietnam's second largest city and there were no indications that the Saigon command was planning to abandon it.

Hue became untenable when North Vietnamese troops seized a portion of Highway 1 that leads to Da Nang, 50 miles south, and

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# VIETNAM

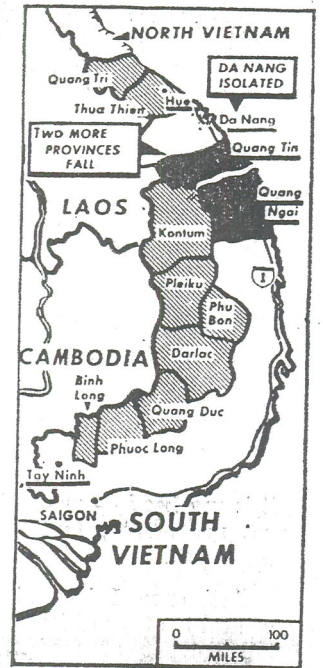
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closed down the Hue-Phu Bai airport, leaving only the water escape route.

It will be the second time that the North Vietnamese have seized historic Hue.

They gained control during the 1968 Tet offensive but were driven out by U.S. Marines and government rangers after weeks of bitter fighting. Months later the bodies of more than 3000 Hue residents were found in mass graves outside the city, executed by their Communist-led captors.

Quang Tin and Quang Ngai provinces south of Da Nang were the tenth and 11th of South Vietnam's 44 provinces to be lost. The North Vietnamese and Viet



AP Wirephoto

The fallen provinces and the port of Da Nang

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Cong now control about 40 per cent of the country's 66,000 square miles and 15 per cent of its population of 20 million.

While civilians streamed south toward Da Nang from Hue, thousands of others headed north toward Da Nang from the provincial capitals of Quang Ngai city and Tam Ky. Quang Ngai city, capital of Quang Ngai province, is 75 miles south of Da Nang and Tam Ky, 35 miles south, is the capital of Quang Tin Province.

Observers estimate that the Communist offensive has created nearly one million refugees.

Associated Press special correspondent Peter Arnett reported from Da Nang ear-

lier yesterday that many refugees were fleeing Hue by boat. One motor ferry bringing refugees down the coast capsized in stormy seas Sunday night. First reports said 3000 refugees were aboard and that all were feared lost. But the Saigon command said later it believed there were fewer than 100 aboard and that 45 survivors had been picked up.

Associated Press