

\$1-Billion in U.S. Weapons Abandoned

Loss by Saigon Force Called Catastrophic

By BERNARD WEINRAUB
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 28—The South Vietnamese have lost more than \$1-billion in American military weapons and other equipment over the last two weeks, according to qualified Vietnamese sources.

The abandonment of hundreds of artillery pieces, trucks, planes, mortars, tanks, armored personnel carriers, rifles and ammunition—coupled with the rapid retreat of army units—is viewed by Vietnamese and Western sources as a stunning and, quite possibly irreversible military and psychological blow for South Vietnam.

A senior Western official, who has spent more than a decade in South Vietnam, said today: "These losses are very, very, very considerable. It's a catastrophic loss."

Another informed Western source said: "We've made no attempt to quantify the loss, but it's staggering. The equip-

Continued on Page 2, Column 5

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

ment has not been saved at all of it left over by the American failure."

An informed Vietnamese said that the armed forces logistics command, which controls the the inventory of all military equipment, had made a tentative estimate of at least \$1-billion in equipment losses—virtually all of it left over by the Americans — as a result of the Government's abrupt decision to abandon two-thirds of the nation and the hasty, panicky exodus of civilians and troops that followed.

These losses are expected to be a key topic of discussion between Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, the Army Chief of Staff, who was sent here by President Ford to assess the deteriorating military situation and Vietnam officials. General Weyand and Ambassador Graham A. Martin met this morning with President Nguyen Van Thieu for over an hour but there was no information on their discussion. The general is expected to remain here for several days.

Lack of Coordination

As the scale of the military retreat becomes apparent, Western military analysts and Vietnamese sources express dismay and alarm at the lack of armed-forces coordination, "the failure of leadership up and down the line" in the chaos that has engulfed army units beset with mass defections and the huge loss of equipment to the advancing North Vietnamese.

Beyond this, Western analysts view the civilian panic in such cities as Da Nang as symptomatic of the virtual breakdown of law and order and the Government's failure to calm the frightened populace in the face of the deteriorating situation.

One intelligence source said: "There's been a complete loss of control by most of the army, by civilians. Self preservation is everything, there's total panic at Da Nang airport, the army has left an extraordinary amount of equipment behind in the North and Central Highlands. It's become a tragedy

that I just can't grasp."

How much equipment has been left behind—as well as how much has been destroyed by the retreating South Vietnamese Army in the highlands and the northern provinces—is impossible to calculate in detail. Western intelligence officials and South Vietnamese say that because of the chaotic situation a clear analysis is unlikely to be forthcoming for weeks.

One source said that dozens of planes and helicopters, including A-37 ground-support fighter-bombers, were left behind at Pleiku when troops began to withdraw. In the retreat from the highlands, said one Vietnamese source, there was "panic everywhere" and soldiers left behind virtually all their heavy weapons.

The loss of the strategic province capital of Ban Me Thuot, which prompted the decision to abandon the highlands and northern provinces, resulted in a panicky troop withdrawal and the abandonment of 105-mm. and 155mm. artillery pieces, all American-made weapons now in the hands of the North Vietnamese.

At Hau Bon, the capital of Phu Bon Province in the highlands and a scene of sharp fighting, the South Vietnamese left behind dozens of M-41 light tanks and M-48 battle tanks as well as 81-mm. mortars.

One highly reliable Vietnamese source said that in the 000 tons of ammunition and 100 tons of bombs were left intact.

In Ban Me Thuot, the source said, 3,200 rounds of ammunition were left behind, together with 81-mm. mortars, 105-mm. howitzers, rockets, generators and trucks.

In Pleiku, said one source, signal equipment worth about \$5-million was left intact. Army radio equipment was also abandoned, enabling the North Vietnamese to overhear transmissions and to create further chaos in the ranks of the South Vietnamese.

It is unclear whether the

losses in the highlands are equal to the losses in the northern provinces of Thua Thien, Quang Nam and Quang Tin. In any event, the equipment losses are said to be considerable.

Hand Weapons Only

"They left everything between Hue and Da Nang and all they came out with were their hand weapons," said a European diplomat today. "The artillery, the tanks, the APC's [Armored Personnel Carriers] were left in tact."

Hundreds of artillery pieces, as well as mortars, tanks, armored personnel care carriers and antitank weapons were left behind in Quang Tri and Quang Nam, largely because of the abruptness of the North Vietnamese advance coupled with the Government's decision to abandon the northern territory.

Exactly how much equipment the United States left in South Vietnam and its worth remain unclear. The United States has spent more than \$150-billion, while in the current fiscal year military assistance was cut to \$700-million.

With the equipment losses, South Vietnamese military units are now in disarray. "I would say a good portion of the South Vietnamese Army—perhaps half of their combat divisions—have either been dispersed or are not combat effective," said one informed Western source. "They'll fight to defend Saigon, I guess, but the military is in terrible shape."