

# Da Nang: The final agony



Refugees in Da Nang reach for cups of water from merchant vessel just docked from Saigon

—AP Photo

## SF Examiner MAR 30 1975 City falls as frantic soldiers flee

Associated Press

SAIGON — Da Nang, South Vietnam's second largest city and its last bastion in the northern zone, fell to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops today, Saigon military officials said.

One official said the government lost four infantry divisions and an air force division, or an estimated 40,000 troopers, who were trapped in the area. "The loss of the city was the single biggest defeat for South Vietnam in the past 20 years," he added.

The fall of Da Nang was reported only hours after President Ford in Washington had ordered U.S. Navy boats to Da Nang to help evacuate a half million refu-

- Ford orders U.S. ships to prepare for evacuation
- Soldiers commandeer rescue flight, force civilians off
- U.S. analysts predict further losses for Saigon

gees who had fled to the port city, 380 miles north of Saigon. The victory left North Vietnamese-Viet Cong forces in control of the entire northern quarter of South Vietnam.

Da Nang's population had doubled to more than a million in recent days as refugees swarmed into the zone, hoping to be evacuated to government-controlled areas farther south.

Da Nang, once a stronghold of the U.S. Marines, had collapsed into disorder and rioting as the end neared.

Refugees and government soldiers battled each other yesterday to board aircraft or barges leaving the city as the Communist-led troops closed in. Frantic soldiers shot and kicked civilians to seize an evacuation plane, and terrified refugees fell off crowded barges and sampans in the harbor.

Saigon officials said a heavy artillery and rocket barrage forced Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, commander of the northern 1st Corps and his staff to flee to a navy vessel that left for the South China Sea. As Truong

and his command staff abandoned the city North Vietnamese and Viet Cong advance units entered, sweeping over government positions, the officials said.

Also lost in the capitulation was millions of dollars worth of military equipment — warplanes, tanks and artillery.

Among the divisions trapped with little hope of escape were the 1st and 2nd infantry divisions, a marine division, rangers and armored cavalry and militia units. The rangers, marines and infantrymen were among South Vietnam's best and were stationed in the northern tier of the country to oppose North Vietnamese

—Turn to Page 14, Col. 1



—From Page 1

infiltration across the demilitarized zone.

Ford, seeking to relieve Da Nang's critical refugee problem, had ordered U.S. Navy transports to stand off Da Nang and other threatened South Vietnamese ports to transfer refugees to "a safe haven farther south."

He also appealed to "all nations and corporations that have ships in the vicinity of the South Vietnamese coast to help" in the evacuation that came too late for Da Nang.

White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen said the American craft would stay far enough away from the coast to avoid "any danger of involvement in hostilities," as the refugees were ferried to the boats by smaller vessels.

Washington sources said four U.S. Navy amphibious vessels have been ordered to Da Nang, South Vietnam's second largest city, but they are still a day and a half sailing time away.

The Viet Cong news agency, in a broadcast monitored in Tokyo, claimed some government troops in Da Nang had mutinied and welcomed the North Vietnamese-Viet Cong forces.

About 400 South Vietnamese soldiers at Da Nang forced their way aboard a rescue flight of World Airways, a U.S. contract airline, and caused a suspension of the airlift for the second day.

The U.S.-sponsored airlift has carried out fewer than 2,000 refugees since it began Wednesday, the sealift more than 20,000 — a small percentage of the estimated 400,000 to 600,000 refugees crammed into Da Nang, normally a city of about a half million people.

The port was in chaos as refugees overloaded barges and ferries trying to get to ships heading for Cam Ranh Bay.

"It's a nightmare," said British nurse Diana Botterill, 26, who was evacuated from Da Nang in a U.S. ship along with thousands of refugees.

"Some went over the side of the barge into the sea," she said.

The whereabouts of the U.S. consul in Da Nang, Al Francis, was not reported, but U.S. officials said he was safe and hinted he was

on a ship at sea. The consulate had been closed earlier and more than 300 Americans had been evacuated, U.S. officials said.

The United States first became heavily engaged in the Vietnam War when U.S. Marines went ashore on Red Beach, on the outskirts of Da Nang, in March 1965.

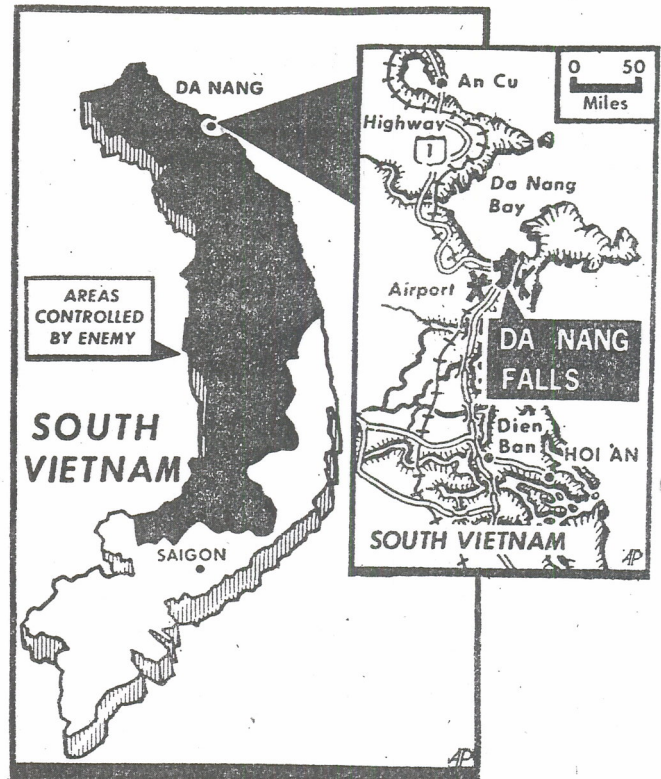
The big Da Nang airfield became a major American Air Force base used to mount bombing raids over North Vietnam and Laos. A former French military compound beside the Da Nang river served as headquarters for two U.S. Marine divisions operating in South Vietnam's northernmost provinces.

U.S. Army divisions and artillery units later reinforced the Marines and thousands of Americans were killed and wounded in eight years of fighting near the demilitarized zone and in the coastal rice paddies.

The Viet Cong claimed they had struck government positions near Qui Nhon, a strategic port with a population of more than 200,000 and, like Da Nang, once a major U.S. base.

Hundreds of civilians were reported fleeing Qui Nhon in fear it would come under attack and South Vietnamese forces would abandon it without a real fight, as soon as they have so many others during the current offensive. Earlier this week, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces overran a district capital and a base camp 40

S.F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle March 30, 1975



miles north, turning toward the central coastal plain that includes Qui Nhon.

In the hours before Da Nang's fall, U.S. defense analysts in Washington predicted the battered South Vietnamese forces probably will lose all coastal enclaves.

The analysts said President Thieu probably would attempt to set up a defense

of the populous area around Saigon and the rice-growing delta to the south, which would mean giving up the rest of the country.

Meanwhile, another U.S. airlift was being readied to carry military equipment and medical supplies to South Vietnam in Air Force planes. The U.S. Embassy said it would begin soon but gave no details except that the military equipment would come from funds already allocated for South Vietnam.