

Hanoi Forces Move South After Taking Da Nang

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gration of Government and military authority. Moreover the loss of Da Nang, a city that seemed militarily invulnerable two weeks ago, was a severe blow to President Nguyen Van Thieu, whose government was in disarray.

News of the loss of Da Nang was made public here dramatically yesterday morning by South Vietnam's Deputy Premier, Phan Quang Dan, who said at a news conference: "It is lost. The Communists have taken Da Nang."

Later in the day, the Saigon

command's spokesman, Lieut. Col. Le Trung Hien, said: "We have lost contact with our headquarters in Da Nang city. We know the situation in the city was in serious chaos. The order has not been restored. It is difficult for us to find out what is happening in the city."

Although North Vietnamese Army units had moved to within three miles of the city to the south and west—and had fired rocket shells at the American-built airport and naval base in recent days—the loss of the city of 500,000 was widely attributed to a breakdown in the army ranks, the influx of as many as 1.5 million refugees and to conditions in streets that verged on anarchy.

"Law and order evaporated," said a Western source. "There was no battle of Da Nang. It was a rout."

One reliable Western source said last night that North Vietnamese soldiers were known to be moving through the streets of Da Nang, a city 370 miles northeast of Saigon. A Vietcong spokesman in Saigon, Maj. Phuong Nam, said the Communists had been in complete control of Da Nang since Saturday afternoon. "And it is true, the Vietcong flag is flying in Da Nang."

By last evening, however, there was some confusion in Saigon about developments in Da Nang and North Vietnamese movements in the city. One highly informed intelligence source said: "Certainly there are North Vietnamese Army forces in Da Nang. There's not all that much organized resistance but there are plenty of people around with guns and it's chaotic."

There were reports of looting, mass desertions among Government forces, fires in the city and chaos as refugees packed piers and bridges to board barges for ships standing offshore in the South China Sea. Heavy rains and rough waves were thwarting the feverish flight of families and soldiers seeking to flee the port by boat.

The United States Military Sea Command is operating several chartered ships for the operation. Two of the cargo vessels, the Pioneer Contender and the Pioneer Commander were near Da Nang late yesterday afternoon and boarding nearly 15,000 refugees for the 15-hour trip south to Cam Ranh

Bay. A reliable Western source said that the North Vietnamese were not thwarting the evacuation and that the operation would continue.

Nearly 30,000 refugees, clinging to railings and packing the decks of freighters and ships, have arrived in Cam Ranh Bay from Da Nang in a desperate and fevered flight from the North Vietnamese. Tens of thousands of others, including army deserters, are still awaiting evacuation from Da Nang, a city that seems to have fallen into the hands of the North Vietnamese virtually by default.

Western sources here say that President Ford's decision to send four United States amphibious ships to help evacuate refugees is not expected to have any significant impact in the operation. The four ships—each carries 2,000 people—will arrive in the area within the next day. But, with thousands seeking to flee, the arrival of the four transports are viewed here as insignificant, given the need and the panic of the civilian refugees.

With the loss of Da Nang, military officials said, were millions of dollars worth of equipment, including scores of airplanes, tanks and artillery pieces. Within the last few weeks, the South Vietnamese Army has lost more than \$1-billion in American-made equipment in the rapid abandonment of two-thirds of the nation.

North Vietnam now controls virtually the entire upper half of South Vietnam, freeing some of its 10 infantry divisions in the north to press southward along the coast to Qui Nhon, 175 miles south of Da Nang, Tuy Hoa, and possibly even Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay. These two enclaves, now swarming with tens of thousands of refugees, are now considered vulnerable by South Vietnamese military authorities.

A reliable Western source said last night that North Vietnamese activity had picked up sharply and abruptly along the coast in recent days. Two port cities, Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa, 45 miles to the south, were being evacuated. And the major city of Nha Trang, about 95 miles northeast of Saigon, is now suffering a scare that has resulted in an abrupt demand for airline tickets to Saigon and rumors of an impending North Vietnamese attack.

"The refugees from the high-

lands are not stopping in Nha Trang but heading down to Saigon," said one Western source. "Saigon is the only place they have faith in."

The loss of Da Nang was viewed as the largest single reverse experienced by Government forces in Vietnam. From the time that the North Vietnamese seized Hue, the former imperial capital, 40 miles to the north, and then the provincial capital of Tam Ky, about 50 miles south of Da Nang, it was obvious to military analysts that Da Nang was in some peril.

But few Vietnamese and few Americans expected the city to be lost so rapidly.

'Collapse of Order'

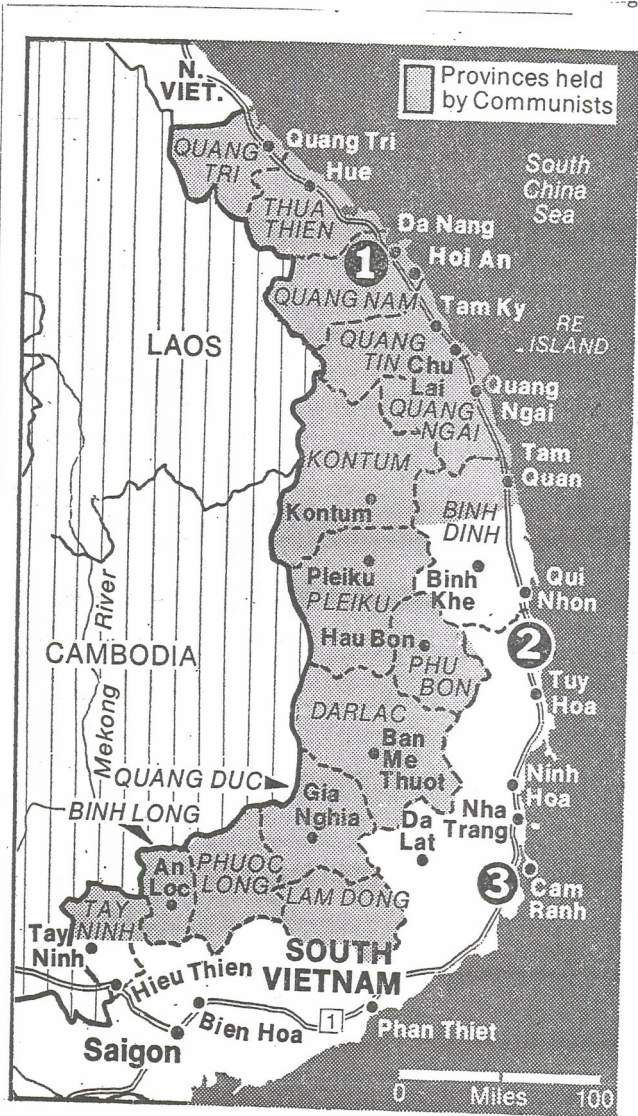
"It fell without a fight," said one highly informed Western source. "One of the tragedies is that you had marine elements fighting outside the city, but inside there was simply a collapse of internal order. It swept all over the city. It was sheer panic."

Clearly, the panic that swept Da Nang was the result of President Thieu's decision to abandon the northern two-thirds of the nation, the abrupt flight of hundreds of thousands of refugees in the northern provinces and the Central Highlands, the erosion of army morale and widespread desertions, the collapse of administrative authority in the provinces and the lack of Government preparation for the flow of refugees.

What has especially shaken army morale is the fact that Lieut. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, the commander of Military Region I, and his staff were forced to leave their headquarters on Saturday for a navy ship on the South China Sea. General Truong is considered one of the best officers in the Army, and his evacuation was the result of a North Vietnamese rocket and artillery barrage as well as the panic.

Peking Honors 2 From U.S.

TOKYO, March 30 (AP) — Carl Albert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and John J. Rhodes, the Republican leader, were honored at a Peking banquet this evening, China's official press agency Hsinhua reported. The representatives, their wives and some staff members arrived in Peking yesterday at the invitation of the Chinese Government.



The New York Times/March 31, 1975
 North Vietnamese troops have taken Da Nang (1) and are reported sweeping toward Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa. Tens of thousands of refugees are arriving at Cam Ranh (3).