

Red Advance Perils Saigon

--- Refugees Reach Capital

APR 3 1975

Army Told

'Fight for

Survival'

SFChronicle

Saigon

Advancing Communist forces threatened Saigon from two directions yesterday as convoys of refugees and soldiers fleeing the Communist drive down the east coast reached the outskirts of this capital city.

South Vietnam's Senate unanimously passed a resolution demanding a change in leadership of the South Vietnamese government. It blamed the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu and the United States for the staggering series of defeats that have given the Communists more than two-thirds of the country.

Heavy fighting was reported around Xuan Loc, 38 miles east of Saigon, where the Communists cut key Highway 1.

Lieutenant General Cao Van Vien, South Vietnam's top general, told the troops in an order of the day: "We have only one way and that way is to fight for our survival. The historic hour has come."

Government troops and most civilians pulled out of the coastal cities of Phan Rang and Phan Thiet yesterday as refugees poured down Highway 1 headed south, military sources said.

They reported scenes of panic and confusion at Cam Ranh Bay, 188 miles northeast of Saigon, and feared that Cam Ranh city was in imminent danger of falling.

Six Australian air force transport planes managed to fly into Phan Rang air base eight miles west of the city and took about 1800 refugees from there to Can Tho in the Mekong Delta.

The five Australian C-130s and one DC-3 each carried out one load before flights ended at nightfall. There

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was little hope they would be resumed today.

Intelligence sources in Saigon said the Communist force of tanks and infantry that has swept down the east coast, swallowing city after city, is threatening Saigon from the northeast, with only about 5000 government soldiers between it and the capital.

The second threat is from Communist forces in a wide arc from west to north of Saigon.

On that side of the capital,

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the equivalent of three divisions of South Vietnamese troops — including two brigades of paratroopers — stand between the Communists and Saigon, the sources said.

The size of the Communist force moving toward Saigon from the northeast is unknown, but it is large and heavily equipped with tanks and artillery, the sources

Intelligence officers were unsure how many North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops have dropped off behind the vanguard to secure captured areas on the central coast.

The first road convoys of refugees and soldiers fleeing the coastal collapse reached the outskirts of Saigon late yesterday.

A ragged caravan of 2000 to 3000 persons on trucks, buses, cars and motorbikes piled up behind military police checkpoints eight miles northeast of the capital in a rainstorm.

Saigon military police disarmed soldiers among them, firing over their heads when they were not quick enough to raise their hands, and turned away civilians whose identity cards did not show a Saigon address.

Intelligence experts said the refugees and fleeing troops have brought the seeds of disorder, looting and ultimate defeat into many Vietnamese cities over the past three weeks.

Phan Thiet, province capital of Binh Thuan province 100 miles east of Saigon, was evacuated by military and civil authorities late yesterday as fighting broke out in the streets.

Merchant and navy ships loaded with thousands of refugees were moving south down the coast toward shrinking safety zones at Vung Tau and further south in the Mekong delta.

Meanwhile, President Thieu conferred with the U.S. Army chief of staff, General Fred Weyand, at Saigon's Independence Palace in a meeting that had been twice postponed by the Saigon leader.

United Press



UPI Telephoto

A woman breast-fed her baby and led her blind and crippled husband along Highway 1 on the way to Saigon. It was just one scene of the great exodus