

Hanoi's Forces Press On, But Action Seems in a Lull

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Saturday, April 5—A vast southward movement of North Vietnamese troops was reported yesterday as Communist units carried out probing actions along the Government's defense lines in an arc around Saigon.

But no major battles or further Government military reverses were reported. In fact, a military spokesman announced that the Government had now re-established contact with the coastal cities of Nha Trang,

Phan Rang and Phan Thiet, which had previously been reported abandoned to the Communists without a fight.

According to some Western officials, the Saigon Government assumed that the cities were lost when commanders, soldiers and refugees fled.

At Nha Trang, the most important of the three and the reported scene of looting by Government troops Tuesday and Wednesday, the commander of a small artillery unit retreating through the city reportedly called Saigon by radio and asked permission to assume command.

This surprising request was granted, and the South Vietnamese Air Force sent small teams to each of the three places yesterday to reopen communications facilities. But how long the isolated troops there could hold out against the large Communist forces nearby appeared uncertain.

Western intelligence officials, meanwhile, were reporting that North Vietnam was now believed to be moving all but one of its eight reserve divisions into South Vietnam.

The commitment of almost all of Hanoi's troops to the South, these analysts say, appears particularly ominous because it comes at a time when the balance of power has al-

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ready been tipped in the Communists' favor.

North Vietnam, whose infantry divisions usually consist of 8,500 men at full strength or more if support units are added, is estimated to have 20 divisions excluding the reserve units inside South Vietnam.

By contrast South Vietnam, which has fielded divisions of 12,500 men at full strength, has only 7 of its 13 left. Six divisions have disintegrated over the last three weeks as large sections of the country have been abandoned, and their tanks, artillery and even trucks have been lost.

Intelligence specialists have long looked upon Hanoi's reserves as an accurate indication of the Communists' military intentions. When the North Vietnamese staged a major offensive in the spring of 1972, for example, it was preceded by large-scale infiltration in the South of those troops.

But analysts say they have never before detected Hanoi sending so many of its reserves southward. During the American military involvement, the Communists usually held more back for defense against a possible American threat to North Vietnam.

When It Probably Began

The movement south is believed to have begun in late February or early March with the 341st Reserve Division. One regiment or more of that division has already arrived in Binh Long Province, north of Saigon, while another element is said to have turned up in Quang Ngai Province, on the north-central coast, and to have contributed to the Communists' quick success there 10 days ago.

Two more reserve divisions are believed to have started south in the first week of March, just as the Communists began their current offensive.

But now, analysts say, movement of four more divisions have also been detected.

It was not immediately clear how many of these divisions had actually crossed the demilitarized zone that used to separate North and South Vietnam. Once inside South Vietnam, the new troops presumably can be moved quickly along the new roads the Communists have seized along the northern coast and in the Central Highlands.

Beside the probing actions reported on the Saigon defense perimeter, the Saigon command also announced scattered fighting in the populous Mekong River delta south of the capital. The Saigon military spokesman said that Government forces there had killed 57 Communists while losing three killed and 32 wounded.

The spokesman reported also that Communist gunners had fired four 122-mm. rockets in Can Tho, wounding four persons. Can Tho is the largest city and economic center of the fertile delta.

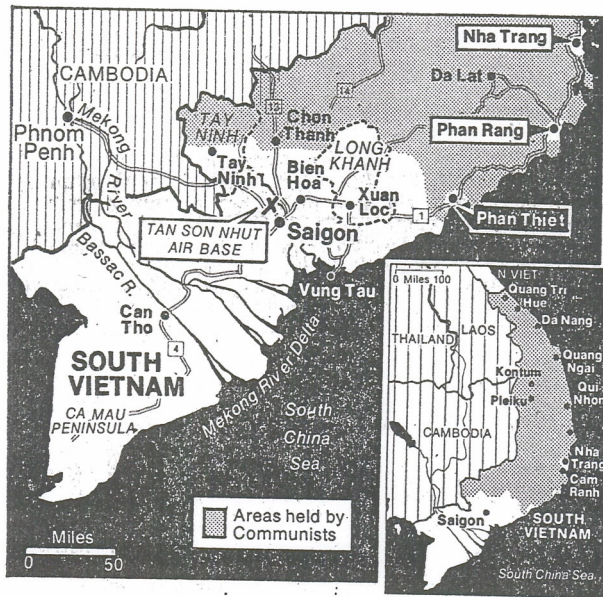
More Refugees Out

SAIGON, Saturday, April 5 (AP)—The United States Embassy said yesterday that refugees were still able to leave the beaches in the Phan Rang area, 160 miles northwest of Saigon, late Thursday afternoon.

The embassy reported that fishing boats and other small craft had brought more than 1,400 refugees out to the United States Navy amphibious cargo ship Durham and 80 others to the Dubuque, a Navy landing-platform dock.

It was said to be first participation in the evacuation by the four-ship Navy task force that President Ford ordered into Vietnamese waters six days ago. The other American ships that have been evacuating refugees from the north and central coasts for the past week are civilian freighters chartered by the United States Government, and a Navy-owned freighter with a civilian crew.

NJT
4-5-75



The New York Times/April 5, 1975

U.S. plane carrying South Vietnamese orphans crashed after take-off from Tan Son Nhut air base. In military action, Saigon said it had re-established contact with troops still in Nh Trang, Phan Rang and Phan Thiet.