

Saigon Claims A War Success

Saigon

The Saigon military command said its troops pushed North Vietnamese forces out of the provincial capital of Xuan Loc yesterday in a fierce battle that was watched closely as an indicator of whether the South Vietnamese army has a will to fight.

The North Vietnamese attacked Xuan Loc, 40 miles east of Saigon, before dawn in their first drive on a major city in the Saigon region since winning control of three-fourths of South Vietnam.

An unofficial source said as many as 300 North Vietnamese have been killed in the fighting at Xuan Loc.

The North Vietnamese artillery, tank and infantry attack resumed just after dawn today. There was no immediate word on casualties or a trend in the renewed fighting.

The Saigon command said Xuan Loc was hit by 2000 rockets and shells as yesterday's North Vietnamese assault began. It said South Vietnamese troops destroyed four tanks.

Communist gunners also hit Bien Hoa air base, 15 miles north of Saigon, with 29 shells that killed two soldiers and wounded seven soldiers and eight civilians, command spokesmen said.

Other sources reported an attack on a village near Tan An, 25 miles southwest of Saigon, but there were no details of the fighting. Highway 4 leading from the capital south into the Mekong delta was said to have been cut for several hours, but traffic resumed later.

Military sources said a South Vietnamese navy cutter was damaged Tuesday when it came under fire off Nha Trang on the central coast. They said there were no casualties.

In Saigon, a Viet Cong spokesman said the pilot who bombed President Nguyen Van Thieu's palace Tuesday had landed his F-5 fighter-bomber at a Viet Cong-held airfield. Thieu, who is widely blamed for the military losses, was not hurt, but at least two persons were killed.

Air force officials said the flier had acted alone, but political sources said more opposition politicians went into hiding to avoid a new police

The Viet Cong spokesman at the Joint Military Commission said the flier who bombed Thieu's palace — identified in South Vietnam as Nguyen Thanh Trung — had been promoted from lieutenant to captain and given the Liberation Distinction Service Order, Second Class after landing his plane.

A Viet Cong radio broadcast said the pilot assailed the Thieu government for seeking to "enrich itself over the blood and bones of the people," and denounced what he called an invasion of the country by "American colonialists."

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