

Inside Two Cities

Torn by the War

Xuan Loc

By Peter Arnett
Associated Press

Xuan Loc, South Vietnam

"You see, we can beat them," said Colonel Le Xuan Hieu, commander of the 40th Infantry Regiment inside Xuan Loc.

He led a score of newsmen yesterday on a tour of the smoldering ruins of what once was a thriving business district.

Two soldiers went by wheeling a cart full of captured weapons. A South Vietnamese medic carefully spoon-fed milk to a heavily bandaged North Vietnamese prisoner.

Shells from Soviet-made heavy guns thudded routinely into the city, but the colonel pushed on. The Catholic church spire was punctured like Swiss cheese, the buildings around it flattened. Soldiers fought to get aboard the few helicopters leaving town, pushing the wounded aside.

But the big news at Xuan Loc, a dusty provincial headquarters in the rubber plantations 40 miles east of Saigon, was that the South Vietnamese army was holding against a concerted push by Communist forces.

For the first time in five weeks of rout that followed the withdrawal from the central highlands, the South

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Phnom Penh

By Sydney H. Schanberg
New York Times

Phnom Penh

The insurgents pushed a little closer to the airport yesterday and the noises of war could be heard as usual at points all around this besieged capital, but the government seemed essentially in control for the moment.

Despite the evacuation of the American embassy Saturday, this city remains strangely calm.

Most of the two million people in Phnom Penh know by now that the Americans have gone and that American aid, the only thing keeping the government here alive, is over or nearly over, and yet all this has stirred no panic nor even widespread nervousness.

But the fatalistic Cambodians have demonstrated an enormous capacity in the five years of this war to accept and absorb suffering, and perhaps they have accepted the inevitability that their city will soon be taken over by the Cambodian insurgents poised just outside it.

The city has basically been abandoned by the outside world. All foreign embassies are closed; the Americans were the last to go. The American airlift, the only supply line the govern-

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UPI Telephoto

Daily shellings have reduced Xuan Loc's market place to charred rubble

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Vietnamese army has not run from a major Communist push, but stood and fought.

According to South Vietnamese officer at Xuan Loc, the North Vietnamese have launched six major attacks against the city in the past five days, each backed up with heavy shellfire.

Xuan Loc is important because it is virtually the last stronghold in the northeast approaches to the Saigon-Bie Hoa region where five million people nervously await a widely predicted military assault.

As far as the commander of the 18th Infantry Division defending Xuan Loc, Brigadier General Le Minh Dao, is concerned, Saigon won't be attacked because his men will hold out.

"I vow to hold Xuan Loc," he told newsmen. "I don't care how many divisions the other side sends against me, I will knock them down."

The North Vietnamese have elements of two divisions aimed at the city. The South Vietnamese have the 18th Division and an airborne brigade to defend it, a force about equal in size to that of the attackers.

But while Xuan Loc has still held, and the morale of the South Vietnamese officers and men here seems very high, the developing military situation has the aspects of a cat and mouse game, with the North Vietnamese the cats.

The Communist forces have cut the road to Saigon.

This has created a sense of imminent peril among the refugees who pulled out of Xuan Loc during the fighting, and who wait at the roadside south of the city where the big Chinook helicopters land to unload ammunition and food.

There were enough heli-

copters yesterday for everyone, but the refugees and a group of soldiers pushed and shoved to get aboard, leaving several seriously wounded soldiers lying on the roadside after the first group of helicopters had departed.

The wounded left on the next flight. But the near-panic was reminiscent of the chaos that enveloped the evacuation of Da Nang and other coastal cities, and indicated how close Xuan Loc is to being a power keg.

And while the North Vietnamese so far have been repulsed in their attacks against the city, there are no indications they are letting up. As yet, they don't seem to have unleashed their major push, even though an average of 2000 shells per day are thumping into the city.

But whatever the future held for the South Vietnamese defenders of Xuan Loc, yesterday they could be proud.

Why had the troops fought at Xuan Loc, and not in the north?

"How can I speak for them?" said General Dao, the 18th Division commander. "I can speak only for myself, and we have fought."

PHNOM PENH

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ment had, has stopped, which means American aid is ended.

Existing stocks of food, fuel and ammunition cannot last indefinitely, no matter how thinly rationed.

Some people who depended on the Americans and other foreigners for their livelihood — the prostitutes, for instance — are upset about the exodus of the foreign community. But others have benefited: The homes the Americans occupied are being stripped clean of the television sets, tape recorders, china and other personal belongings they had to leave.

Perhaps the most bizarre thing about Phnom Penh is what is being said about it in Washington. According to news reports, Presidential press secretary Ronald Nes-

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sen and other officials, said that the American airlift, after being suspended one day during the evacuation, had been resumed yesterday with drops by parachute because the airport has now been closed by insurgent mortar fire.

But newsmen visited the airport throughout the day and could find no parachute drops, no airlift and no mortar fire.

What was more, the airport was open.

Indeed, the insurgents did push forward a little yesterday, in heavy fighting, to within two miles of the airport on the north.

They could hit it with mortars from that range, but they seem content to send in

their daily ration of 40 or 50 rockets and artillery shells, which do not close the airport but do cause damage and occasionally take lives.

Yesterday at least one of the government's small, single-engine bombers was destroyed by a shell. An unconfirmed report said two of the planes were struck on the ground and two pilots were killed.

But military planes and a handful of civilian commercial planes are continuing to fly in and out of the airport, which is about five miles west of the city.

One mystery here is whether the Americans left anyone behind with communications equipment to report regularly to Washington on the situation.

Most people assume that Central Intelligence Agency operatives are still here, but there doesn't seem to be anyone around who is openly looking after American interests or property.

Such a person would be rather busy trying to keep the homes of embassy personnel from being stripped, particularly since some of that stripping is being done by military policemen assigned to guard the homes.

Nessen said the Ford administration remains in contact with the Phnom Penh government, but he did not explain by what means.

Presumably, it is not by the public telegraph office.

A new government was organized in Phnom Penh Saturday, a crisis government in which the civilian leadership turned over power to the military.

This military regime has quickly stepped up security in the city, tightened the curfew, declared that the

three-day Cambodian new year, which starts today, will not be a government holiday this year, and increased nighttime aerial surveillance around the city with flares and gunships.

These are virtually the only open signs of urgency or warning that hint at Phnom Penh's terminal condition.