

Peril to Saigon Grows as Troops

Artillery Fire Disrupts Activity at Big Air Base

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guns and other heavy artillery were causing continuing casualties yesterday and apparently weakening the will to fight of Government forces spread out between Bien Hoa and Xuan Loc, 28 miles away.

The Saigon command has been pouring all available troops into the fight there, but in consequence has made other areas vulnerable to attack.

One such attack began yesterday soon after sunrise at Phan Rang, one of the last coastal towns still held by Government troops.

A Government spokesman said that a North Vietnamese division supported by 40 tanks attacked Phan Rang and that by 9 A.M. radio contact was lost with defending troops outside the town.

Phan Rang Airport, two miles from the town, had apparently fallen and the Sixth Air Division there, formerly based at Nha Trang, 45 miles to the north, is reportedly lost. An air division normally has 250 planes, but many of the Sixth's planes were lost at Nha Trang.

The spokesman said that fighting was continuing inside Phan Rang, which has been swamped with refugees in the last two weeks.

Communist Units Move Swiftly

In recent days, the Communists have apparently been maneuvering entire divisions with great speed and effectiveness, keeping Government forces off balance.

As the Communist units move their big guns forward, a South Vietnamese Air Force informant said last night, it seems likely that even Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon will come under artillery fire in the next few days.

The general Communist of-

fensive also extended over a wide area of the Mekong River delta.

The most serious delta fighting appeared to have been near Ben Tranh, a district capital 24 miles southwest of Saigon on Route 4.

The Saigon command said that 47 Communist soldiers were killed in the fighting there yesterday.

But Route 4, the capital's overland link with the south, was reported because of the fighting, with long lines of vehicles waiting to get through.

The Communist troops in the area have been bearing down hard on Route 4, with the evident aim of cutting off Saigon's supply of rice and other provisions from the delta.

Saigon Reports a Victory

Saigon reported a success in a fight yesterday in Chau Doc Province, 100 miles west of Saigon on the Cambodian frontier. In a battle for An Phu, a district capital, 77 enemy soldiers were said to have been killed with no Government casualties.

A Saigon spokesman also voiced concern last night about one of South Vietnam's offshore possessions—the Spratly Islands.

The spokesman said that radio contact with one of the northernmost islands of the chain, Song Tu Tay, 275 miles off the southern coast, was lost on Monday at 8 A.M.

A South Vietnamese naval vessel was dispatched Tuesday to investigate, the spokesman said.

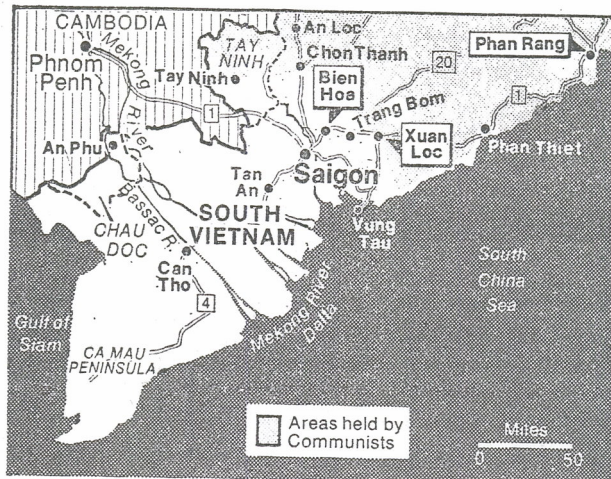
In Saigon, the atmosphere is tense, especially during the night curfew hours. On Tuesday night exceptionally heavy patrols of combat policemen and troops were moving around the city, evidently as a result of reports that Communist demolition units had entered their capital.

Defending Approaches to Xuan Loc Fall Back

YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 1975

17 1975

Chau Doc



The New York Times/April 17, 1975

Communist shelling disrupted Bien Hoa. Government setbacks were reported at Xuan Loc and Phan Rang.



Associated Press

South Vietnamese soldiers carrying a fallen comrade from the scene of fighting yesterday near Hung Loc, a town on Route 1 east of Saigon.