

SEChronicle

Outward

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Calm at

An Outpost

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A ranger lieutenant gestured laconically up the road toward a stand of trees and said, "Sure we'll hold them, why not? You have to hold somewhere."

Despite the growing fears in Saigon that a Communist onslaught is imminent, the atmosphere yesterday at this advance position was calm despite the explosion of an occasional shell.

Troops and civilians here are under no illusions about the strength of the Communist divisions all around them. The shelling has badly frightened some, and various government command posts have been moving their headquarters and artillery to keep the enemy guessing.

But for the moment, the line is stable and there is no panic, despite the general knowledge that if and when the final attack on Saigon is launched, it probably will come through here.

Yesterday afternoon truckloads of marines and other troops and ammunition convoys were moving up the road to forward positions some 27 miles northeast of the Saigon city limits.

A trickle of refugees from farther east on Route 1, heading back from beleaguered Xuan Loc toward Saigon, was still arriving at a checkpoint here, but they were being turned back by government troops.

The Saigon command has ordered troops here to prevent refugees from moving closer to Saigon because many may be Communist infiltrators.

Between Bien Hoa and Saigon, the road was jammed yesterday evening with heavy military trucks carrying loads of 750-pound and 500-pound bombs.

The bombs were being removed from depots at Bien Hoa air base to Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport because of shelling at Bien Hoa and sapper probes.

Traffic was backed up on the road next to a vital highway bridge because one of the trucks had a flat tire. Air Force enlisted men perched atop their potentially devastating loads flicked ashes from their cigarets among the big pallets of bombs apparently unconcerned that a stray hit by an enemy shell could blow up the entire convoy.