

REDS MAKE MOVES TO CUT OFF SAIGON, BUT ATTACKS EBB

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Lack of Action Near Capital
Follows a Vietcong Hint
of Changed Tactics

NEW THREAT TO ROUTE 4

North Vietnamese Division
May Seek to Sever Link
With Mekong Delta

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Monday, April 21—Communist divisions were reported yesterday to be maneuvering rapidly near Saigon with the obvious intention of sealing off the capital from all approaches.

Communist forces refrained from attacks in Saigon's immediate vicinity, however, as part of a change of tactics that became evident Saturday.

Col. Vo Dong Giang, deputy chief of the Vietcong military delegation here, hinted on Saturday that the Communist side might delay an expected military onslaught against Saigon to allow time for a possible peaceful conclusion of the war.

Until this development, the Communists had advanced through South Vietnam swiftly.

Route 4 May Be Target

Two North Vietnamese divisions are known to have moved out of the Tay Ninh area, near the Cambodian border.

One of them, the Ninth Division, is said to be moving into Long An Province south of Saigon, presumably to cut Route 4, which leads to the rice-producing Mekong River delta.

Despite the threat to the road, fighting near Route 4 yesterday in the vicinity of Ben Tranh, 26 miles from Saigon, was said to have been moderate in scale.

The heaviest fighting of the day, according to the Saigon military spokesmen, appeared to have been in the vicinity of Ham Tan, the capital of coastal Binh Tuy Province, 63 miles east of Saigon.

A Link Lost, Restored

At one point, radio communication with the province headquarters at Ham Tan reportedly was lost, but the spokesman said late yesterday that it had been restored.

He added that fighting was continuing, particularly in an area seven miles northeast of Ham Tan, but that enemy forces greatly outnumbered Saigon Government troops there. More than 10 Soviet-style T-54 tanks were reportedly spotted northeast of Ham Tan yesterday morning.

The forces moving against Ham Tan presumably were the same ones that overran Phan Thiet, a province capital farther up the coast, on Saturday.

If Ham Tan falls, the next apparent target will be Vung Tau. Should Vung Tau be taken, Saigon will have lost its last access to any port on the South China Sea. Communist control of Vung Tau would also choke off the waterway system, in-

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cluding the Long Tao River, that provides direct sea access for Saigon.

Xuan Loc Again Hit

Northeast of Saigon, the fighting along Route 1 in the vicinity of Xuan Loc reportedly continued with no significant change. Xuan Loc, which by now has been leveled, was reportedly under nearly constant shelling but still in Government hands.

Closer to Saigon, the Bien Hoa air base was struck by 15 shells yesterday. However, since air combat operations there have virtually halted, the shelling made little difference. No casualties were reported.

Along the northwest approach to Saigon, despite the depletion of major North Vietnamese strength around Tay Ninh because of movement to-

ward Saigon, regional Vietcong troops were said to be keeping up the pressure.

Two hamlets along Route 22 in an area 11 miles southeast of Tay Ninh were reported heavily attacked by two Vietcong regional battalions yesterday morning. One of these towns, Bau Mau, was said to have been bombarded by 100 rockets and by noon Communist troops reportedly had a foothold in the town. The other town, Tra Vo, was also heavily attacked and may have been overrun.

Jet Reported Downed

Air support was sent to the Government defenders, but one of the air force's rapidly dwindling number of Northrop F 5-E fighters was said to have been shot down by a heat-seeking missile.

Twenty-five miles south of Tay Ninh, about 5,000 more Vietnamese became refugees when a string of hamlets along Route 22 was bombarded by 107-mm. rockets yesterday. Reports from the area said that 40 rockets had struck and many houses had been burned down.

While the fighting continued to exact a high cost to both sides in troops and material, there was growing speculation that the final military showdown was still weeks away.

Given the momentum they have maintained during the last month, North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces, now about 10 divisions strong within striking distance of Saigon, are believed capable of assaulting the capital at any moment.

But reports from Moscow and other Communist sources, including the Vietcong, strongly suggest that if President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned soon, and if most of the Americans, including Ambassador Graham A. Martin, were to leave, the Communists would negotiate an end of the war.

Old Women's Children