

Attacks Panic Saigon;

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SAIGON, April 29 (Tuesday)—Tansonnhut airport was bombed Monday afternoon and the airport and capital was hit Tuesday morning, causing panic in Saigon and killing two American Marines.

The attacks came after Duong Van (Big) Minh took over as president of South Vietnam Monday in a bid to negotiate a political settlement to the war. He declared a "government of national reconciliation and concord" and called for an immediate cease-fire and peace negotiations.

The Vietcong, however, rejected the bid almost immediately and demanded

additional concessions by South Vietnam.

Communist forces launched heavy rocket and artillery fire into Saigon and Tansonnhut as dawn broke Tuesday, bringing with it the first reports of American casualties.

American officials, in touch with each other by radio, said two U.S. Marines have been killed. With choking voices, the officials asked where the bodies were.

The radio traffic spoke of Tansonnhut being heavily shelled—"four rounds in five seconds on the flight line"—which means artillery pieces probably Russian-made 130-mm. guns, were being used.

The city itself was calm at dawn af-

ter the panic which followed the bombing of the airport on Monday, but there was the sound of helicopters overhead.

Through the pre-dawn hours, 40 to 50 rounds of rocket or artillery fire were heard in the capital. There were a number of loud explosions, apparently ammunition dumps which were blown up.

As the rocket and artillery fire streamed in, Communist forces closed in around Saigon like a vise. There was heavy fighting Monday at a bridge on the northern outskirts where just one day earlier refugees had been crossing to stream into the city.

Monday's bombing of Tansonnhut airport, packed with South Vietnamese

VC Reject Truce Bid

refugees and some departing Americans, was carried out by several A-37 jet fighter-bombers. They destroyed a bomb storage area and also hit several South Vietnamese air force C-130 transport planes. The U.S.-run evacuation was brought to a halt, was resumed and then was halted again by Tuesday's shelling.

(A U.S. Air Force C-130 transport was reported destroyed, but it was unclear whether this occurred during the bombing raid on Monday or in the pre-dawn shelling on Tuesday, the AP reported in Washington.)

Massive numbers of communist troops backed by tanks, artillery and sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles now

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'... They Ask Where the Bodies Are'

"Rockets and artillery rounds have been coming in heavily here since 4:30 in the morning. There have been perhaps 40 to 50 rounds, and we can hear them now landing in the still-darkened city.

"Helicopters have been circling in the sky (we know not whose), and we can hear the Americans talking to each other on their radios. They say that Tansonnhut Airport is being heavily shelled—four rounds in five seconds on the

flight line—which means artillery, probably Russian 130s. Two U.S. Marines have been killed and, with choking voices, they ask where the bodies are. There is machine-gun fire reported on the western side of the air base. There could be an American evacuation at dawn, but the air base may be too dangerous now.

"The city is calm. I will try to update, but don't count on it soon."

—H. D. S. Greenway

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surround Saigon and could enter the city at any time. Instead, they have squeezed the city with exquisite precision, cutting off exit routes, capturing nearby towns and raising tensions among the populace to a fever pitch.

Monday morning a company of Communist troops dug in near a bridge on the northeastern outskirts of Saigon and cut off the highway to Bienhoa, a major base 18 miles away, which is itself threatened. There was heavy fighting at the bridge, which is just a few minutes' drive from downtown Saigon and near the U.S. embassy commissary.

Also early Monday morning South Vietnamese air force sources reported Communist-built Migs flying over Saigon. Reporters familiar with the appearance of Migs also said they saw these planes in the sky. The planes, which can reach Saigon from bases the Communists have captured in recent weeks, apparently departed without doing any damage.

Shortly after Minh's speech Monday evening, several A-37 jet fighter bombers attacked Tansonnhut airport on the northwestern edge of the capital destroying a bomb-storage area and hitting several South Vietnamese air force C-130 transport planes parked in a row.

Later, the jets flew over portions of downtown Saigon and drew heavy anti-aircraft fire. The crowded downtown area went into panic as soldiers fired into the sky for about 15 minutes. The government then announced a 24-hour curfew.

Theories on the bombing vary. Some speculate that the A-37 pilots were enraged because their families were not included in the evacuation of Americans and Vietnamese being mounted

from Tansonnhut, Saigon's major international commercial and military airport.

Others speculate that the A-37s had been captured by the Communists during the past weeks, and that captured South Vietnamese pilots were induced to fly the raid.

Addressing the assembled politicians and government officials in Independence Palace Monday, Minh said his task is clear: "To obtain a cease-fire accord, the sooner the better, to negotiate a political solution for South Vietnam in the frame of the Paris agreement, to end the war and to restore peace, in a spirit of national reconciliation and concord."

Minh announced that his first measures will be to release political prisoners and to abolish press censorship.

He announced that his vice president will be Nguyen Van Huyen, a Catholic and former senator who resigned his seat after Thieu arranged to have the constitution amended so he could run for a third presidential term.

The new prime minister, Minh said, will be Sen. Vu Van Mau; a leading Buddhist opposition figure who led a political struggle against Thieu late last year.

Minh is expected to name his Cabinet Tuesday. He said it will be made up of "personalities who represent religious groups and political tendencies of South Vietnam . . . and whose position in favor of reconciliation is so obvious that no one could doubt about their will for peace."

Several times the new president referred respectfully to the Vietcong as "the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam"—their proper title.

Minh told soldiers to "defend the territory which is left and to defend peace. . . . When the cease-fire order is given, you should rigorously execute that order in accordance with the clauses of the Paris agreement."

He also asked all government officials and police to continue "watching vigilantly to prevent all sabotage."

Addressing the PRG and "our friends of the other side," Minh said, "We sincerely want reconciliation, you clearly know that . . .

"Your standpoint has always been the implementation of the Paris agreement. This has always been ours, too. From the Paris agreement as our common grounds, let us sit together to seek together for a solution which is most beneficial to our homeland . . .

"I propose that we stop immediately our reciprocal attacks. I hope you will accept this proposal and that the negotiations will begin at once."

Speaking of "our allies"—perhaps a reference to the U.S.—Minh said the government wants to maintain friendly relations and welcomes economic and humanitarian aid.

He called on Vietnamese not to

A South Vietnamese soldier comforts a youngster wounded during fighting on the northern outskirts of Saigon.

leave the country but to "stay in order to build with us . . . a new south for future generations."

Minh, 59, was the head of the military junta that took power after the 1963 assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Minh was in turn pushed out several months later and has been a political outsider ever since.

Minh is South Vietnam's third president in a week. His ascendency, of dubious constitutionality, was carefully orchestrated by Vietnamese and by the American and French embassies who believe that a neutralist government offers the only chance to avoid an immediate Communist military takeover of Saigon.

Only hours after Minh had finished speaking, however, the Vietcong press spokesman, Maj. Phuong Nam, said his statement "is not in keeping" with demands made by the Communists.

Nam said these demands include the abolition of the Saigon government and its army.

"The Saigon administration, instrument of U.S. neocolonialism, must be abolished. The repressive and coercive

war machine used against the South Vietnamese people must be abolished," the Vietcong statement said.

"Only in this way can the most cherished aspiration of the South Vietnamese people be realized in a most favorable manner and in keeping with the spirit of the Paris agreements on Vietnam."

The political scenario for the next few days is not clear, but what is clear to experienced observers is that if it does not live up to Communist expectations they will simply come in and capture Saigon.

"What they want now is a military surrender combined with a setting up of a National Council of Reconciliation and Concord in accordance with the agreements signed in Paris," said a South Vietnamese who has had long-time contacts with the Communists.

The NCRC is envisioned in the Paris agreement, which went into effect in January 1973. As a tripartite body which would be established after the cease-fire in order to arrange for elections.

