

8 BASES NEAR DMZ HEAVILY ATTACKED BY NORTH VIETNAM

Ground Assaults on 3 Posts
Follow Shelling — Saigon
Force Is Said to Retreat

~~MAR 31 1972~~
LOSSES ARE UNKNOWN

Drive Is the Biggest Since
Last Summer — Fighting
Goes On Into the Night
NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 30—Communist gunners and ground troops staged a series of heavy, apparently coordinated attacks on eight South Vietnamese fire support bases along the demilitarized zone today, and the fighting reportedly continued into the night.

More than 500 rockets were reported to have been fired into the South Vietnamese positions, scattered between Quangtri city and Khesanh, in what was described as the heaviest North Vietnamese attacks since early last summer. Three other bases were assaulted by ground troops, reports from the field said.

[Three hundred South Vietnamese marines defending a base called Holcomb, 20 miles west of Quangtri, were forced to retreat to Sarge, a nearby base, The Associated Press reported. Military sources in Saigon were quoted as saying it was too early to tell whether the assaults on the South Vietnamese installations signaled the start of a long-expected enemy offensive.]

There was no immediate word on casualties or the number of North Vietnamese troops involved.

U.S. Gunship Downed

In the air war, the United States command announced that North Vietnamese anti-aircraft missiles had shot down an American AC-130 Spectre gunship over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos. The 14 crewmen were reported missing and presumed dead. [The command later reported the loss of a big rescue helicopter shot down in southern Laos during a training mission, The Associated Press said. The five crewmen aboard were killed.]

The Spectre, a four-engine plane, uses infrared devices, computers and 40-mm. cannon to search out and destroy North Vietnamese truck traffic on the trail at night. This was the first time the loss of such a plane was announced. However, United States officials said that two other AC-130's had been shot down before the command began reporting figures for the air war over Laos in 1970.

The enemy assaults in the northern part of South Vietnam were said to have been supported by 130-mm. artillery fire from the northern half of the demilitarized zone, which straddles the border between the two Vietnams.

Last February, United States warplanes flew a series of heavy raids on the southern part of North Vietnam in an

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effort to knock out the long-range 130-mm. guns when their presence was first reported there. But, United States military sources said, not all the guns were destroyed then.

The most recent attacks marked the first time that the heavy guns, which have a range of 17 miles, were reported to have been used by the Communists along the demilitarized zone.

The Communist attacks were launched despite repeated heavy raids by B-52 bombers over the last few months on suspected enemy infiltration routes and base camps in the area.

Communist gunners have been firing rockets and mortars into the South Vietnamese positions along the demilitarized zone for the last three weeks, but the attacks were reported to be the first by enemy ground troops.

Fire Bases Sarge Holcomb and Nuibaho in a mountainous area east of Khesanh, were reportedly attacked by North Vietnamese ground troops. The five other bases — Alpha 21, Charlie 1, Charlie 2, Dongha and Camp Carroll—were said to have been hit by rocket and artillery barrages that began at 3 in the afternoon.

The eight bases are garrisoned by soldiers of the Third South Vietnamese Division, a new unit put together last fall. A few American advisers are stationed with the South Vietnamese troops. American troops of the First Brigade,

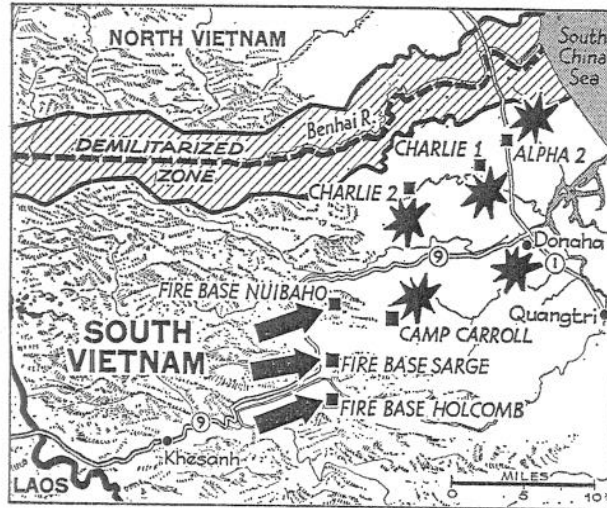
Fifth Infantry Division (Mechanized) were stationed at the bases along the demilitarized zone until they were withdrawn late last year.

South Vietnamese and American fighter planes flew bomb-

ing missions in support of the besieged South Vietnamese positions, reports from the field said.

American intelligence ana-

cluding the 324B and 304 Divisions have reported heavy North Vietnamese infiltration through the demilitarized zone over the last few months, in- sions. Altogether 70,000 North Vietnamese troops have been reported moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam this spring, almost twice the figure for last year.



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Arrows indicate the bases that were attacked by enemy troops; bursts, the installations struck by rockets.