

Reds Break Defense Line Below DMZ

SAIGON — (UPI) — North Vietnamese infantry with heavy artillery support broke through the western corner of South Vietnam's defense line below the Demilitarized Zone today and pushed the defenders back toward Quang Tri, 16 miles below the DMZ.

Front dispatches said the heaviest North Vietnamese attacks in four years had overrun five and possibly six Vietnamese bases.

One enemy unit of unknown size knifed tonight through to within a mile of Quang Tri to hit the big base with 2000 rounds of mortar fire.

The bases stretch along a 15-mile north-south line about 15 miles inland from the South China Sea.

An east-west defense line stretching 15 miles inland from the sea was holding but was under heavy rocket, mortar and artillery attack.

Bases Captured

Front dispatches said the attackers drove the South Vietnamese from three bases today and two yesterday and said a sixth base was under heavy attack and that its fate was not known.

The U.S. Command sent helicopters into the Quang Tri Airbase yesterday to help the South Vietnamese withstand the onslaught.

Field dispatches said the helicopters took off tonight and attacked the North Vietnamese mortar positions with unreported results.

The Communists also attacked six government bases in the central highlands 280 miles north of Saigon and 200 miles below the DMZ action.

A U.S. spokesman said the Communists had shot down four U.S. helicopters in the area since Tuesday, killing one American.

'Big Offensive'

The fighting below the DMZ "looks like the start of a pretty big offensive," an American officer said.

The government rushed its last reserves from the Saigon area to meet the new threat in the central highlands.

Saigon itself was alerted for possible rocket attacks.

The U.S. Command reported the loss of a U.S. Jolly Green Giant helicopter over Laos Monday and said five men were missing.

The United States rushed fighter-bombers and helicopter gunships to the fighting along the DMZ and one of the helicopters was shot down. The crew escaped.

The U.S. lost its second

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HEAVY FIGHTING FLARES UP IN DMZ
U.S. destroyers batter North Viet, MIG downed

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computerized gunship in two days. The 15-man crew was rescued but 14 Americans were lost and presumed dead in the downing of one by SAM missiles on Wednesday.

TV Screens

Military sources said the AC130s, whose accurate gunfire is directed by a computer in Thailand, are the most effective planes against Communist supply lines with their electronic sensors and television screens showing the nighttime landscape.

Ability to shoot them down could jeopardize the U.S. campaign against Communist supply routes in Laos.

Front dispatches said heavy Communist attacks and tremendous artillery barrages of thousands of rounds drove the South Vietnamese out of base camps Dong Ha East, Khe Gio and Camp Fuller today. Saigon troops withdrew from base camps Holcum and Mai Loc the day before.

Military sources in the area said Communist ground troops and artillery were putting heavy pressure on a sixth base, Pedro, tonight, and it might already have fallen.

The Communists also hit the Quang Tri Combat Base tonight with a barrage of 200 mortar rounds.

Mortar Attack

Field reports said the mortars hit the base for more than an hour, destroying at least 10 buildings near the main headquarters and sending bloodied soldiers running for cover.

Casualties were not immediately known.

The string of South Vietnamese bases just below the DMZ form what military sources here have called a "Siegfried Line" against any Communist push southward toward the old imperial capital of Hue and Quang Tri itself.

New Barrages

Tonight, military sources said the Communists had fired thunderous rocket, artillery and mortar barrages against base camps Alpha 4, Charlie 2, Alpha 2 and the city of Dong Ha.

A small U.S. Marine detachment is based at Alpha 4 directing naval gunfire from ships of the U.S. 7th Fleet pouring shells into Communist gun positions in the DMZ.

An American military source said U.S. fighter-bombers striking into the southern half of the DMZ

where the Communist artillery apparently is located and U.S. helicopters supporting South Vietnamese ground troops came under intense ground fire today.

The officer who flew over the area yesterday said "there were battles all over the place, smoke rising from the ground wherever you looked. It was pretty bad down there, and we were taking a lot of fire up in the air."

South Vietnamese spokesmen said their forces counterattacked in one area and

killed 115 Communists at a loss of 17 men. They said civilians who had just returned to their homes in the area after a period of quiet are streaming southward again today toward Quang Tri.

The U.S. Command said that one of two Air Force F4 Phantom fighters escorting bombers on raids against the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply network in Laos intercepted and shot down a Soviet-built Mig21 on the North Vietnamese side of the border last night.