

# U.S. Aides in Saigon Calm In Face of North's Drive

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD APR 3 1972

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 2—American military and civilian officials in Saigon reacted calmly today to the North Vietnamese offensive below the demilitarized zone, many adopting the attitude, "It's a South Vietnamese operation now and we're going to leave it to them."

Despite the fighting, the heaviest in Vietnam since the Tet offensive of 1968, few Americans were in their offices. Many celebrated Sunday by going to church or swimming. Others could be seen in downtown Saigon taking pictures of Vietnamese girls.

Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, the commander of United States forces in Vietnam, returned to Saigon today after an unannounced trip outside the country. But Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker remained in Nepal, where he flew yesterday to visit his wife, Carol Laise, the Ambassador there.

## No Evidence of Concern

South Vietnamese in Saigon also appeared unconcerned at the deteriorating military situation in Quangtri, South Vietnam's northernmost province. Cabinet members took their usual Sunday holiday and crowds of Vietnamese thronged the streets.

One reason for the casual American attitude, a high United States official said, was that the Easter holiday had kept officials in Washington away from their desks and as a result the embassy had not yet been flooded with urgent cablegrams.

Some United States officials here also appeared anxious to discount the extent of South Vietnam's defeats on the battlefield to avoid giving Communists a major propaganda victory of the kind they achieved during their Tet offensive in 1968.

The enemy's spectacular attack on the American Embassy and their assaults on South Vietnam's cities during the Tet offensive have often been credited with helping turn American public opinion against the war.

But behind the lack of American reaction appeared to lie a general decline of American interest in Vietnam.

An Army officer formerly stationed in Quangtri with the last American combat unit to serve there, the First Brigade of the Fifth Infantry Division, said he did not care if the North Vietnamese overran his old base camp. "They can have it," he said.

The brigade was withdrawn last July, leaving only a few

American advisers with Vietnamese units near the demilitarized zone straddling the border between the two Vietnams.

Another high-ranking officer said, "It's a South Vietnamese operation now and we're going to leave it to them." He added that the only thing the United States could supply now was air power to help drive off the North Vietnamese.

Because of heavy clouds and rain over the area, however, American air strikes have been limited. The clouds are not expected to lift until late tomorrow or Tuesday.

President Nguyen Van Thieu has made no public comment on the Communist attacks. He appeared at a reception last night marking the fifth anniversary of the South Vietnamese Constitution and reportedly appeared unconcerned.

Most observers expect that when the full extent of the reverses become known, President Thieu will be criticized. The question is, how much of his tenuous political system will be eroded.

Some of Mr. Thieu's supporters in the American Embassy believe that the Vietnamese living in Saigon, 50 miles south of Quang Tri, will not become overly excited.

General Abrams apparently left Saigon to spend the Easter weekend with his family in Bangkok; where they live. It was considered likely that Ambassador Bunker would also be called back.