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SAIGON RESTRICTS ITS PRESS ON WAR

Tells Papers to Carry Only
Official Reports on Fighting

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 3—The director of the National Press Center warned the Vietnamese press today that it must print only official Government versions of the battles in Quangtri Province.

A spokesman for the Saigon command said that the Ministry of Information would take action against the American news agency United Press International for reporting what he termed a "completely false" account of a South Vietnamese surrender at one base.

Despite banner headlines in the local press reporting South Vietnam's military setbacks, most people in Saigon seemed calm and uninterested in the fighting, which is taking place 350 miles to the north.

Children Flock to Pools

School children, who had today off for the Easter holiday, crowded Saigon's swimming pools, and thousands of young people jammed downtown movie theaters and restaurants. None of Saigon's residents appeared to be putting up sandbag bunkers as they did during the Lunar New Year offensive of 1968.

As one modishly dressed teen-age boy said at a popular cafe, La Pagode: "We have been fighting this war for many years. This will not end the war. So why should we get excited?"

In warning the local press to print only news from official releases and the daily official Vietnam Press Agency bulletin, the director of the National Press Center, Vu Khanh, said Vietnamese papers could no longer use accounts written by American news services.

This afternoon's issue of the Saigon Post, an English language daily, appeared with several blank spaces on its front page where Government censors had deleted parts of a United Press International article on the Quangtri fighting.

The Vietnamese press is frequently censored and some opposition papers are seized almost daily by the police. But in the past the press had often circumvented Government restrictions by using American news agency accounts of sensitive events.

Concern Among Americans

There was some concern in the American press corps about the statement made today by Lieut. Col. Le Trung Hien, the Saigon command spokesman, when he said that the Ministry of Information would take action against U.P.I. for its article on the battle of Camp Carroll, which was abandoned to the enemy yesterday.

Some newsmen feared that the Saigon Government might now try to impose censorship on American reporters' dispatches.

President Thieu's usually vocal opposition has not yet used Saigon's military setbacks to criticize the President. Vu Van Mau, the leader of the opposition Buddhist slate in the Senate and an outspoken critic of Mr. Thieu, said: "North Vietnam should immediately stop its invasion of Quangtri. It is seriously violating the 1954 Geneva accords."

The accords, which ended the war between France and the Communist Vietminh, provided for a temporary division of Vietnam into two states at the 17th parallel. The area straddling the border between the North and the South, known as the demilitarized zone, was to be kept free of troops or defensive positions.

President Thieu flew to Da-nang today to confer with his field commanders as the Saigon Government began to show concern over the fighting in the demilitarized zone.