

# Hundreds of Planes Await Clear Skies in DMZ Area

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Tuesday, April 4—The United States command marshaled an armada of hundreds of B-52 bombers and fighter planes today, poised for possible strikes against North Vietnam and against its 15,000-man force pouring into South Vietnam.

[Nearly a score of B-52's pounded North Vietnamese troop concentrations and staging areas 5 to 11 miles south of Quangtri city and 19 miles southwest, according to the Associated Press. It said nearly 500 tons of bombs were dropped.]

With enemy troops controlling half of South Vietnam's northernmost province, Quangtri, the United States Navy dispatched the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk from the Philippines to join the carriers Coral Sea and Hancock off Vietnam. There were reports that a fourth carrier, the Constellation, would follow soon from Japan, where she is being refitted.

Each carrier has some 90 combat planes.

## Drive on City Expected

Cloudy weather has prevented effective bombing and permitted the North Vietnamese to sweep their adversaries from more than a dozen artillery bases that once constituted the country's northern defense line. The cloud cover was expected to lift today.

An attempt by the attackers to seize the province capital, Quangtri city, was expected imminently.

As many as 100,000 refugees were streaming southward from the area of the fight-

Continued on Page 10, Column 4

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

ing, according to American sources who were in Quangtri to observe the situation. All United States ground troops have been pulled out of the Quangtri combat base, two miles northwest of the provincial capital.

Casualties on either side are not known in the confused situation. But the South Vietnamese say they have killed about 1,000 enemy soldiers while losing about 100 dead themselves. [According to a Reuters dispatch from Hong Kong, the Vietcong say they have killed or captured 6,500 South Vietnamese soldiers in the five days of the attack.]

Heavy fighting all day yesterday was reported just north of Dongha City, which was said to be in flames after being hit by thousands of rounds of North Vietnamese artillery and by North Vietnamese T-34 tanks. More than 30 tanks were said to have rolled south from the demilitarized zone since the attack began Thursday, and South Vietnamese forces say they have destroyed 25 of them. But this claim has been disputed by other observers.

## Anxiety Increasing

The American military command also exhibited increasing anxiety yesterday over South Vietnamese reverses, and a United States spokesman said "additional precautionary actions," including air and naval gunfire, would be taken to "protect American lives."

The command's statement was widely taken to mean that American fighter planes and B-52 heavy bombers would begin intensive air strikes against attacking enemy troops south of the demilitarized zone, which straddles the border between the two Vietnams, and also possibly against North Vietnam.

The spokesman gave no details, but said that the actions would be taken to carry out the Nixon Administration's "frequently expressed determination to use our remaining air and gunfire assets to protect our diminishing forces." He added, "this is exactly what we said we would do."

According to pilots and high-ranking officers here, the American air fleet, which numbers more than 600 fighter bombers on three aircraft carriers and at bases at Danang and in Thailand, was prepared to strike at the North Vietnamese troops now advancing in a 10-mile-wide stretch below the demilitarized zone. The raids will also hit North Vietnamese gun emplacements, surface-to-air missile sites, and troop concen-

trations inside North Vietnam above the zone, according to officers here. "Does anybody doubt we'll hit them with all we've got?" one officer said.

American sources in Danang reported little change in the battle situation since the South Vietnamese gave up their last positions beyond Dongha city at Camp Carroll and Mailloc and retreated in disarray south of the Cua Viet.

The enemy troops involved in the fighting are believed to be from two North Vietnamese regiments and the 304th Division, possibly reinforced by some elements of the 324-bkd Division. American intelligence experts believe the invasion force, including anti-aircraft crews and armored forces using tanks, amounts to 15,000 to 17,000 men.

The Americans believe that the 308th Division is being held in reserve north of the demilitarized zone.

#### Difference on Size of Force

At the Danang headquarters of Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam a statement was issued, saying that all three divisions, reinforced by three artillery and anti-aircraft regiments, an armored regiment and surface-to-air missile crews were involved in the fighting. This would amount to 30,000 to 40,000 men.

Many United States B-52's, which fly above the cloud cover and drop 30 tons of bombs apiece in long rectangular patterns, were reported to have struck at North Vietnamese troops and weapons in the piece of territory below the demilitarized zone that has been abandoned by the South Vietnamese.

The North Vietnamese radio contended yesterday that a B-52 had been shot down in the northern part of the zone on Sunday, but American pilots interviewed in Danang said they thought the claim was untrue. The United States command in Saigon said it had no such loss to report.

Though American officials in Saigon have been saying for the last few days that they expect simultaneous heavy attacks in Kontum Province in the Central Highlands, no major North Vietnamese assaults were reported there yesterday. Two brigades of the 101st Airborne Division have been sent to Kontum Province since February.

In Tayminh Province, however, the North Vietnamese attacked over the weekend, supported by two American-made M-41 tanks captured from the South Vietnamese in eastern

Cambodia last spring. The attack drove the defenders from an artillery base on Route 22 three miles south of the Cambodian border, but the South Vietnamese later reoccupied the base. Saigon is reportedly sending thousands of reinforcements west from Tayminh along Route 22 to guard against the possibility of an attack on the capital.

In the northern area, since the old imperial capital of Hue is the next major city south of embattled Quangtri, troops of South Vietnam's First Division are dug in at artillery and forward positions in the mountains of western Thua Thien Province. They will try to prevent an attack on the city by the North Vietnamese 324B Division, which is thought to be to the west near the Ashau Valley close to the Laotian border.

To strengthen the troops of the Third Infantry Division and a marine brigade fighting in Quangtri Province, a day-long airlift by American and South Vietnamese transport planes was bringing thousands of reinforcements yesterday from the strategic reserves forces in the Saigon area. The reinforcements were said to be from another marine brigade, as well as from ranger, infantry, and armored cavalry units. Thus the South Vietnamese capability appears to be stretched to the limit.

#### Concession by Saigon

The South Vietnamese command admitted for the first time yesterday that all of its bases north and west of Dongha had been lost. But its spokesman said that South Vietnamese units were regrouping for a counterattack.

An American officer who observed the confusion around Quangtri city, where Saigon's troops had retreated after abandoning the Quangtri combat base Sunday, said the situation was not one that invited confidence.

"I don't know how well they'll do," he said. "They're disorganized and the other side has the advantage of much better small-unit commanders. It really depends very much on the air strikes."

The big question here is whether the North Vietnamese will dig in and try to hold the positions they have taken or retreat under the cover of the clouds, as they came.

According to American intelligence, the North Vietnamese troops have enough supplies for only a week or 10 days, and are not bringing down more by truck.

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South Vietnamese who lived the conquered area are moving out because when the bombing starts in earnest it will probably be heavily destructive. Vietnamese officials in Quangtri expect a total of about 100,000 refugees to come south about 10,000 are already living with relatives and in temporary centers in Hue and more thousands have reached Danang.

#### Foe Claims 6,500 Toll

HONG KONG, April 3, (Reuters)—The Vietcong claim today to have killed or captured