

Men Flee, Gen. Ired

SAIGON — (UPI) — South Vietnamese Brig. Gen. Vu Van Giai, standing knee deep in the muddy Song Mien river, used his own steel helmet today to try to beat back his soldiers fleeing from the advancing North Vietnamese.

He whacked one soldier squarely on the head, then asked the soldier why he was running away. The stunned and frightened South Vietnamese said he was trying to get away from Communist tanks.

"What tanks? Show me a tank. If you find one, I'll go with you with an anti-tank weapon," Giai said.

Thousands of North Vietnamese troops using amphibious Russian-built tanks and more than three dozen landing craft crossed the Cua Viet River, a tributary of the Song Mien, today and headed south into South Vietnam's Quang Tri Province.

So far in their five day old drive, the North Vietnamese have captured 14 South Vietnamese bases. Hundreds of truckloads of supplies were moving down Highway 1, the major highway from Hanoi, to supply the advancing soldiers.

South Vietnamese officers said they planned to hold the advance, then counterattack to drive the Communists back across the Demilitarized Zone, some 10 miles to the north.

Lt. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam, the military commander of South Vietnam's northern quarter, said he would bring in more replacements. President Nguyen Van Thieu ordered the country's three major cities—Saigon, Da Nang and Hue—stripped of all garrison troops to be sent to the north.

Lam said almost all the hundreds of casualties suffered so far occurred in heavy fighting for the government bases.

At Camp Carroll, a regimental infantry headquarters, South Vietnamese troops tried to surrender, Lam said.

He said the regimental commander, an unidentified colonel, committed suicide when his troops raised the white flag.

The incident was denied earlier by the Saigon command.