

# On Battlefield in Dongha Region, Enemy Tanks Rumble Ahead

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 and Quangtri City by Brig. Gen. Vu Van Giai, the division commander.

When the attack was renewed today the South Vietnamese held once again despite several hundred artillery and mortar rounds and a mistaken attack by an American jet, which dropped a bomb in the middle of Dongha.

The attack began after the South Vietnamese tanks tried to wipe out a pocket of North Vietnamese dug in south of the river and just west of Dongha. Enemy tanks suddenly began moving forward on the other side of the river and, simultaneously, mortars and 130-mm. guns opened up, driving the American-made South Vietnamese M-48 tanks back toward town. But they then held in that position.

The lieutenant at the bridge, a slight, boyish-looking man who likes to chew American gum, said the North Vietnamese were brave but crazy. Their officers force them to walk across the bridge, even during the daytime, and we just shoot them off," he explained.

He said he felt his men could hold on as long as American air support continued.

The 75-yard-long bridge was blown up Sunday by two American advisers who placed the charges, but it is still passable on foot.

Yesterday, on Route 1 near Quangtri City, Priv. Hoang Van Hai and the rest of his North Vietnamese platoon cut the vital highway linking the embattled provincial capital with the rest of Vietnam.

The 15 Communist soldiers, all teen-agers, stopped traffic for five hours, but all

except Private Hai were killed and he was captured by militiamen.

Private Hai said he crossed the demilitarized zone last week. "They did not tell us why—we only knew we were to hold the road," he said as he looked at the bodies of his companions.

The soldier, who grew up in Quangbinh Province, said he had been in the army—the 320th Division—only four months and had not been in battle before.

Several of his captors, ap-

parently seeing how bloody his feet were from running through the scrub trees without shoes, and sensing his fear, began to talk to him politely and wipe the sweat from his face.

On the highway the trucks began to roll again, but some villagers stopped an American soldier coming up to protect us? The Communists are very fierce."

The often-maligned militia had fought carefully, but well

enough to retake the road. They lost only two wounded.

The North Vietnamese had moved in behind an old French bridge during the night and dug trenches on either side of the road, in terrain consisting of low white sand dunes covered with scrub trees, so they could fire on passing traffic.

The North Vietnamese blocked traffic almost all the way to Hue, 35 miles to the south. Trucks loaded with ammunition and gasoline to resupply the front stood bumper to bumper.

South Vietnamese Air Force helicopters flew lazily overhead, but for reasons unknown to the militia, did not fire on the North Vietnamese.

When the frontal assault toward Quangtri city was stopped by the South Vietnamese marines, the Communists began infiltrating around the city in smaller groups. The only troops to oppose them along the highway were militiamen of the Regional and Popular forces

because all regular troops had been sent to reinforce the front line.

The captain in charge of the militia kept calling in reinforcements from nearby villages until he had about 150 soldiers east of the road. They moved slowly in on the enemy, firing a stream of American-made grenades.

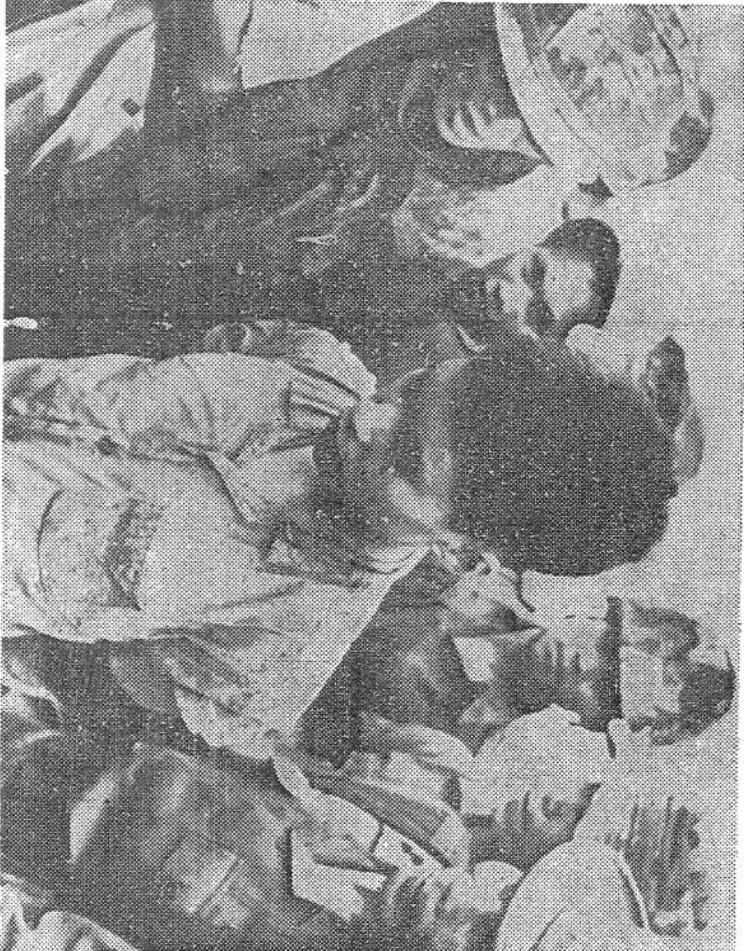
Suddenly the surviving North Vietnamese began to retreat, tiny figures in green running across the highway and through the dunes. "We've got them!" the militia shouted as they raced in pursuit.

A badly wounded North Vietnamese tried to speak to the militiamen as they stood around him. "Let me kill him," one said as he kicked the wounded man.

The South Vietnamese here are enraged with the northernners because of the intensive shelling that have wiped out whole villages.

After this correspondent moved a few feet away, the angry soldier fired his rifle into the wounded man's face.

The Northerners' simple equipment lay scattered by their bodies: small enamel bowls, bars of rough soap, rubber sandals and tiny plastic bags of cooked rice.



The New York Times

**SOLE SURVIVOR** of North Vietnamese group of 15 teen-agers who cut vital road for five hours being questioned yesterday. He is Pvt. Hoang Van Hai, and was treated kindly by his captors. Richard Brummett, who made photograph for The New York Times, was among seven correspondents hit by mortar fire when foe attacked a tank battalion command rear river at Dongha. None was critically hurt, according to reports.



The New York Times/Huynh Ngoc Luong

**ENEMY MISSILE HITS:** A soldier watches as an enemy missile destroys a plane in the Dongha area.