

NYT 4-20-72

Units of Last Division Left in North Said to Move South

By WILLIAM BEECHER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 20—Advance elements of the last North Vietnamese combat division remaining on northern soil were reported tonight to be entering the demilitarized zone toward the battle in South Vietnam.

Senior Administration officials said the movements—now yet reported in Saigon—were a dramatic sign that Hanoi, rather than scaling down its combat operations, was stepping up preparations for a long campaign in the northernmost provinces of the South.

Military analysts said the division, the 10,000-man No. 325C, was accompanied by tanks, long-range artillery and anti-aircraft weapons. While two below-strength training divisions are believed to be left in the North, they said, No. 325C is the last of 13 combat divisions to be committed to the fight in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

It was the passage of the 308th Division through the DMZ three weeks ago with

tanks and artillery that angered President Nixon and led to the resumption of extensive air strikes on targets throughout North Vietnam, including Hanoi and Haiphong.

Defense and State Department sources said that, despite recent suggestions to the contrary, the United States had markedly "throttled back" the air war over the North since the big strikes by heavy bombers and fighter-bombers in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas last weekend.

On Tuesday Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said there was "no substance" to news - agency reports from Saigon that the President had temporarily suspended the strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong while awaiting a response from North Vietnam. The same day a White House spokesman declared that Mr. Laird was "stating the authorized position of the United States Government."

Since the weekend no B-52's have ventured north, the Defense and State Department sources noted, and fighter-

bombers have been restricted temporarily to targets just north of the zone.

The reduction in the size and scope of the bombing, they added, was designed both to see whether Hanoi might show some sign of restraint and to improve the atmosphere for pursuing "certain diplomatic initiatives." They refused to discuss the nature of the initiatives.

The movement of elements of the 325C Division into the demilitarized zone, together with other activities in recent days, has convinced many officials that North Vietnam does not intend to call off or diminish its offensive soon.

"The fact that our bombing in the North has been throttled back does not close any options for the future," a Pentagon official declared.

Officials doubt that the division would have been moved all the way from Hanoi to the zone to remain aloof from the battle. "We could be wrong, but having come this far, we expect them to come all the way," one said.

In recent days, analysts said, North Vietnam has moved numbers of tanks, radar-controlled anti-aircraft guns, troop reinforcements and supply trucks on all four roads running through the zone.

In addition, a four-inch petroleum pipeline along the coast is being extended into the zone with the apparent intention, the officials said, of continuing into Quangtri Province.

Whether the cutback in air raids can be considered a formal suspension or not, strikes deep into North Vietnam have been ruled out by Washington until further notice.

Some Administration planners suggested that if Hanoi had been willing to start withdrawing some troops across the DMZ, the United States might have responded by limiting its bombers to the 20th Parallel.

As the withdrawal continued, they said, the limit of the bombing would be moved successively farther south until, with the restoration of the situation prevailing before the invasion began on March 30, raids on the North would halt.