

South Viets Flee Base 40 Miles From Saigon

Examiner News Services

SAIGON — South Vietnamese troops abandoned a base camp only 40 miles northwest of Saigon today, military sources said, and pulled out of two more artillery bases in the central highlands, leaving only five of the eight bases set up there a month ago still manned.

The two bases abandoned in the highlands were Delta and Yankee, field reports said. A third base, Charlie, was overrun a week ago.

The eight were established along "Rocket Ride" between Kontum and the Cambodian border last month to block Communist attacks on Kontum from the triborder area of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The central highlands has long been a Communist stronghold.

The camp near Saigon was at Dau Tieng and had been occupied by a regiment of the South Vietnamese army's 18th Infantry Division.

The troops inside it and their U.S. adviser pulled back and formed a protective ring around the nearby district town of Tri Tam in anticipation of a Communist strike there. Civilians were reported fleeing Tri Tam today. South Vietnamese military spokesmen said 50 Communists were slain in subsequent fighting around the town. There were no reports of South Vietnamese or American casualties.

The Viet Cong's "Liberation Radio" said Communist troops had moved into Dau Tieng.

UPI reporter Matt Franjola, in the highlands head-

quarters of Pleiku, said Delta fell to a tank-led assault last night. It was the first time Communist armor had appeared in the Highlands since an unsuccessful raid on a Green Beret camp in 1969.

This morning, a paratroop battalion at Yankee, about two miles north of Delta, abandoned the base even though it had not yet come under ground attack, military sources told Franjola.

The troops at Yankee went north to Fire Base Five, about three miles away, overlooking the critical headquarters camps of Tan Canh and Dak To in the valley below, the sources said. Yankee had been shelled heavily for several days.

The evacuation of the two bases left a stretch of about seven miles in Communist

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hands, and military men feared if the North Vietnamese brought artillery onto the ridge they could blockade and bombard Tan Canh and Dak To. Allied-built roads snake up the ridge and it would not be impossible, they said.

South Vietnamese Second Corps Headquarters claimed the enemy murdered about 100 Montagnard tribesmen at a remote village in the central highlands. They included women and children, the report added.

South Vietnamese spokesmen in Pleiku said the bodies of the victims were found yesterday by a government Border Ranger battalion that drove North Vietnamese forces from two of three enemy-captured frontier hamlets around the Dak Pek camp bordering Laos.

Knives

The spokesmen reported the victims had been killed with knives by North Vietnamese and Communist Montagnard forces for cooperating with the Saigon government.

The Montagnards are mountain tribesmen whose allegiance is divided between the two sides. Many tribesmen were trained by the U.S. Green Berets for fighting in the mountains.

Lt. Col. James E. Roe, Lenora, Kan., senior U.S. adviser to the Rangers, said he received a report through the Rangers that they "found people with their throats cut," but "As far as I know, there is no accurate count."

Rose said that the Dak Pek camp and 11 hamlets around it were under siege. North Vietnamese forces seized control of three hamlets Thursday, but Rose reported they had been pushed back from two of them.

Kontum

U.S. officials said the North Vietnamese were aiming for Kontum, Pleiku and Binh Dinh provinces in what is expected to be a two-month campaign for those major objectives of the enemy's offensive.

"Before this thing is over we will have to get used to losing a lot of territory," said a U.S. field adviser.

North Vietnamese troops on the southern front pressed their siege of the provincial capital of An Loc, about 60 miles north of Saigon.

More than 1000 rounds of rockets, mortars and artil-

lery bombarded the city in what has become a daily pattern.

Nearly 40 U.S. B52 bombers unleashed up to 1000 tons of explosives on North Vietnamese troop concentrations on the edges of An Loc and around South Vietnamese fire bases in the central highlands.

Pullout

Associated Press correspondents Peter Arnett in the central highlands reported the defenders of Fire Base Delta got nervous, claimed they were overwhelmed by the enemy and decided to give up the base. They backed up 500 yards to another position called Delta South.

Arnett said five government soldiers were killed, 50 were wounded and 17 are missing.

American advisers think if the North Vietnamese launch a maximum effort they will try to cut the road between Kontum and Pleiku to the south, knock out Dak To and go past the paratrooper fire bases to seize Kontum City.

The minimum effort would be to cut Highway 14 in many places and attempt to choke off Dak To and Kontum, the advisers say.

Fighting also erupted in the southern tip of Cambodia opposite South Vietnam's southwestern Mekong Delta.

The Saigon command claimed 15 enemy were killed while one South Vietnamese soldier was killed and 29 were wounded in the Cambodian action.
