

North Vietnamese Appear On Way to Dividing South

NYTimes

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY APR 26 1972

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, April 26—Military officers reported yesterday that North Vietnamese forces attacking on several fronts in the Central Highlands had trapped 2,000 to 3,000 Government troops in a border outpost northwest of Kontum, pressed 5,000 others into retreating and appeared to be on their way to cutting South Vietnam in two.

The enemy radio called upon the Communist forces in the western part of the Central Highlands to "hit hard at enemy base camps" in the city of Kontum and "move forward, pursue and close in on enemy remnants and not allow them to flee from the Kontum area."

The retreat by 5,000 Government troops left most of northern Kontum Province to the North Vietnamese, who were reported advancing toward Kontum city with at least 20 tanks and heavy artillery.

Leader Reported Missing

The retreating Government forces, which on Monday were driven out of the forward command post of the 22d Division at Tancanh, 25 miles northwest of Kontum, were reported trying to form a new defense line yesterday 11 miles from the city. The division's forward commander, Col. Le Duc Dat, was listed as missing.

Some of the 2,000 South Vietnamese paratroops who manned Tancanh's western defenses on a mountain ridge line until Tancanh and nearby Dakto fell on Monday have retreated, but northward instead of toward the south with the other Government forces. They joined about 1,000 rangers at the Benhet border camp, which is now inaccessible by road and thus cannot be resupplied except by helicopter.

The only way these forces can get out is by fighting their way through the enemy-controlled stretch of road to Tan-