

Kontum Defenders Brace For an Imminent Assault

NYTimes

APR 27 1972

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, April 27—North Vietnamese forces reportedly edged closer to the Central Highlands capital of Kontum yesterday, and Government troops scrambled to prepare the city's defenses for an assault that appeared to be imminent.

In the coastal region east of Kontum, meanwhile, other enemy forces overran a South Vietnamese base on Route 1, South Vietnam's main north-south highway.

A South Vietnamese spokesman said the fire base, known as Dunglieu, near the coast 60 miles due east of Kontum, was taken by North Vietnamese attacking in "human waves." There was no report on the fate of the 150 defenders.

While the North Vietnamese were apparently pressing to cut South Vietnam in two at the middle of the country, a Government convoy was reported to have succeeded in fighting its way along Route 19 from Quinhon on the coast to Pleiku in the highlands. [Enemy troops blocking the road at a pass near Ankhe were cleared away by South Korean troops, The Associated Press reported.]

It was the first group of Government vehicles to get through since April 9, but South Vietnamese officers said the success of the column should not be taken as an in-

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dication that the road had been reopened permanently.

Both Kontum and the neighboring highlands city of Pleiku to the south were reported under sporadic enemy shelling during the day.

Reports from Kontum said emergency antitank defenses were being prepared. Government troops that had been forced by North Vietnamese attacks into retreating down Route 14 after the fall of the army command post at Tancanh on Monday were reported regrouping 10 or 11 miles north of Kontum.

As tension continued to increase in the highlands around Kontum, American officials estimated that there were 15,000 to 20,000 North Vietnamese soldiers in the area. The defenders were put at 10,000 troops.

With the North Vietnamese offensive entering its fifth week, these other developments were reported:

¶On the front north of Saigon, the North Vietnamese continued to pour artillery shells into Anloc, the town 60 miles from the capital where 8,000 Government troops are under siege. But there was little movement on the ground by either the North Vietnamese besiegers or the Government defenders in what American military men described as another day of stalemate.

¶To the west of the Anloc area, just inside Cambodia at roughly the beginning of what is known as the Parrot's Beak area, South Vietnamese pilots reported having destroyed four of 10 enemy tanks spotted in the area. It was the first time North Vietnamese tanks had been reported that far south, and it added to speculation that the Communists were preparing another major drive into South Vietnam from the Parrot's Beak, about 30 miles east of Saigon.

¶In the closest fighting to Saigon yet in the current offensive, Government forces reported killing 54 North Vietnamese soldiers Tuesday 24 miles northwest of the capital, near the district town of Cuchi. Six South Vietnamese soldiers were reported killed, 12 wounded. A Government spokesman said the North Vietnamese fired four 122-mm. rockets into a South Vietnamese base camp in Cuchi.

¶American military officers said United States planes continued their raids in the panhandle or southern region of North Vietnam, aiming at supplies, troop concentrations and anti-aircraft emplacements. The officers would not say how many raids were flown, but there have been 100 to 125 on most days since the bombing was resumed in the North earlier this month in retaliation for the Communist offensive.

¶In the northernmost part of South Vietnam, South Vietnamese militiamen reportedly clashed Tuesday with North Vietnamese troops attempting to cross the Cua Viet east of Dongha and were said to have killed 90 of them. A Government spokesman said 10 militiamen were killed and 30 wounded.

Northern Front Quiet

While it appeared to be relatively quiet yesterday on the northern front, where the North Vietnamese began their offensive at noon on March 30 with heavy barrages of artillery fire, American officials said they were convinced a new drive would be staged in the area.

"I don't think there's any question that the North Vietnamese are going to make another try at either Quangtri or may be even Hue in the next week or two weeks," said one American official.

In the air war over South Vietnam yesterday, American pilots were reported to have flown 449 strikes, concentrating on the three main fronts—the far north, the Central Highlands and the area around Anloc.

Early yesterday, a United

States Air Force C-130 transport plane was shot down near Anloc, and the six Americans aboard were listed as missing.

It was the second C-130 to have been shot down over Anloc in two weeks.

United States B-52's, meanwhile, continued to drop scores of 500-pound and 750-pound bombs in long rectangular patterns that cut swaths through rubber plantations only two miles northeast and three miles southeast of Anloc. There were five B-52 missions averaging three planes each that attacked North Vietnamese troop concentrations and staging areas there in the 24 hours ended at noon yesterday.

The view prevailing among senior military officials in Saigon is that the North Vietnamese are not so much interested in trying to capture Anloc—the combination of Communist artillery fire and American and South Vietnamese counter bombardment has reduce the northern half of it to rubble—as they are in pinning down and, if possible, annihilating the 8,000 South Vietnamese infantrymen and paratroops locked in the town.

So far, they have not succeeded in driving the South Vietnamese out of the town, which is the capital of Binhlong Province. But, the military officials added, Lieut. Gen. Nguyen Van Minh, the overall South Vietnamese commander of the region, has not made a serious attempt to move his forces out of their well dug-in positions in Anloc.

Fighting Is Stalemated

It is the combination of American and South Vietnamese air power that has helped the South Vietnamese troops on the ground to stalemate the North Vietnamese at Anloc, despite the scores of North Vietnamese heavy tanks used in the fighting. About fifty enemy tanks have reportedly been destroyed in the attacks at Anloc so far.

In the Central Highlands, South Vietnamese troops have abandoned more than half a dozen bases in three days, under pressure from two North Vietnamese divisions supported by numerous tanks.

A Government spokesman said last night that American and South Vietnamese planes had knocked out six North Vietnamese tanks Tuesday less than two miles from the airfield at Kontum.

The spokesman said that four more tanks and 33 trucks were destroyed by American planes near the abandoned base of Tancanh, about 25 miles northwest of Kontum.

With enemy forces threatening the city of Kontum, a large part of Kontum Province, which borders on Laos and Cambodia, is in Communist hands.

Binh Dinh Base Captured

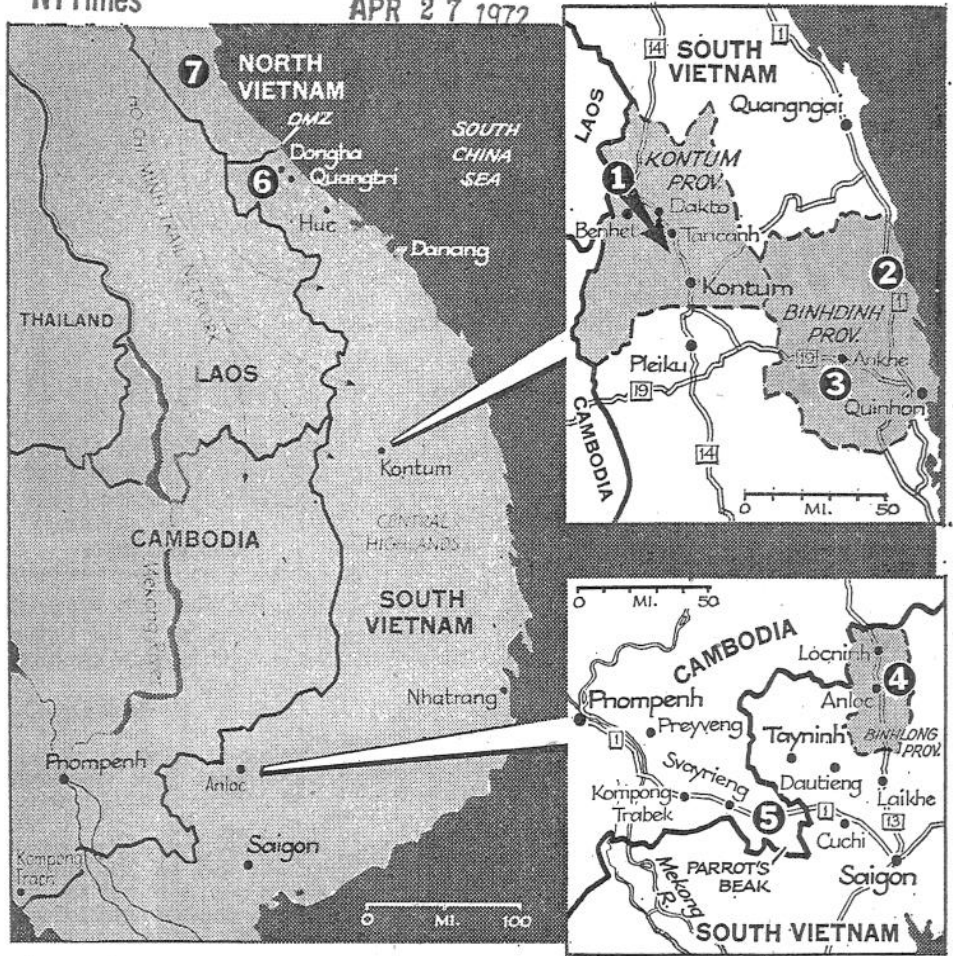
In coastal Binh Dinh Province directly to the east, enemy forces extended their hold on the northern coastal region with their capture yesterday of Fire Base Dunglieu. Last Wednesday, Government forces were routed from the nearby district of Hoaian with heavy losses.

In the Cambodian fighting, North Vietnamese troops over the last week have seized a 45-mile stretch of the Parrot's Beak section along Route 1, overrunning eight Cambodian towns and outposts.

Small mortar and ground assaults against the two besieged cities were reported again yesterday by the Cambodian command. Three Cambodians were killed and 15 wounded at Preyveng, a military spokesman said.

American analysts in Saigon say they are unsure whether the Communists intend to try to march straight along Route 1 toward Saigon or to swing south into the Mekong delta province of Kientuong.

According to accounts from Cambodian refugees, the North Vietnamese have executed large numbers of Cambodian soldiers and officials, apparently in an attempt to set up their own government.



The New York Times/April 27, 1972

Enemy reportedly edged toward Kontum (1 on upper inset map). A Government base near coast (2) was overrun. South Koreans dislodged foe from pass at Ankhe (3). Garrison at Anloc (4 on lower inset) was shelled. Saigon pilots reportedly hit a tank force in Cambodia's Parrot's Beak (5). Fighting flared near Dongha (6 on the over-all map). U.S. warplanes bombed in the panhandle of North Vietnam (7).