

Enemy's Drive on Quangtri About 3 Miles From City

South Vietnamese Say They Knocked Out 8 North Vietnamese Tanks—Foe Is Reported Regrouping at Kontum

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Friday, April 28—North Vietnamese forces backed by tanks, heavy artillery and rockets reportedly kept Quangtri under attack throughout the day yesterday and drove to within two and a half miles of the city.

[By Friday morning, the defenders of Quangtri had fought off the initial assault, Reuters reported from Saigon, quoting military sources.]

South Vietnamese commanders said their troops had knocked out eight tanks used by the North Vietnamese in what appeared to be a renewed attempt to take Quangtri, a provincial capital in the north-eastern corner of the country. The enemy troops began their attacks at 6 A.M.

A drive from the northwest was said to have penetrated to within two and a half miles of

the city. Other attacks were reported from the west and south.

How many tanks were deployed during the day was not known, nor was it clear how many North Vietnamese were participating in the attack. But three divisions of about 10,000 men each have been identified in the vicinity of the demilitarized zone, which is about 20 miles northwest of Quangtri.

The Government has a division of about 10,000 men, two marine brigades and a ranger group—each with about 3,500 men—in the Quangtri area.

In the Central Highlands to the south, meanwhile, other North Vietnamese troops were reported improving their positions for an assault on Kontum, capital of Kontum Province.

Continued on Page 16. Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

American intelligence officers said enemy troops had been spotted from the air moving artillery closer to the city. Another indication that such preparations are under way, the officers said, was the absence of artillery fire. None was reported at Kontum yesterday. In previous days, heavy fire had made Kontum airfield unusable. after last graf, second add

The defenders also received supporting fire from eight United States destroyers offshore.

Sketchy reports from the field on the fighting in the Quangtri area said enemy forces were advancing under covering of fire from 130-mm. artillery and 122-mm. rockets.

At least 100 shells were reported to have landed in Quangtri city, which had a population of 30,000. However, most residents have fled south since the invasion across the demilitarized zone began three weeks ago.

Early estimates on enemy casualties in the fighting ranged up to 300 dead. There were only fragmented reports on Government losses.

Declared 'Tactical Emergency'

At 8:30 A.M., two and a half hours after the attack had begun, the South Vietnamese Third Division, which has its headquarters in Quangtri city, declared a tactical emergency.

A senior American officer said this was a signal that a unit "thinks its about to be overrun," and gives it the highest priority for air strikes and artillery fire.

But, Americans in the field said, the weather was "very, very bad" for flying and virtually no bombing in close support of the Government troops was possible.

Seven B-52 raids with an average of three planes each were reported in the area, but the closest the heavy bombers came to Quangtri city was 10 miles. There were also a number of attacks by smaller

planes, which dropped their bombs by radar guidance.

In their initial attacks late in March and early in April, the enemy forces established themselves in a strip extending about 10 miles south of the demilitarized zone, but they stopped short of an assault on the City of Quangtri.

For the last three weeks until yesterday, there had been relatively little fighting in the area and allied intelligence officers said driving that time that they thought the Communists were refurbishing and reorganizing for a concerted drive on Quangtri.

With the North Vietnamese now apparently hastening the pace of their offensive, there were these other developments:

North Vietnamese troops besieging the provincial capital of Anloc, where 8,000 South Vietnamese are bottled up, 60 miles north of Saigon reportedly fired 2,260 artillery shells into the town. Military officers also reported two infantry clashes in Anloc and said a North Vietnamese tank had been destroyed seven miles north of the town.

Off the coast of North Vietnam, two United States Navy destroyers exchanged fire with smaller enemy vessels on Wednesday, a command spokesman said. Neither American ship was struck, but the spokesman said that three enemy craft were sunk and a fourth was heavily damaged. The command described the vessels only as "enemy surface craft."

A total of 23 B-52 raids were reported in South Vietnam in the 24 hours ended at noon yesterday, and 461 strikes were flown by smaller, tactical fighter-bombers. The greatest concentration of fighter-bomber raids, 185, was directed at targets in the Central Highlands.

In the Central Highlands, American and South Vietnamese officers said they believed 15,000 to 20,000 North Vietnamese were converging on Kontum.

Rice Is Running Low

Allied strength in and around Kontum is reported to be only

about half as great. Nevertheless, the American advisers there said they believed adequate forces and materiel were available to defend the city.

In the last few days, enemy forces have surrounded Kontum. They have cut Rute 14 on both the north and South sides of the city of 30,000, and they also are said to control the hills ringing it. Their grip is said to particularly strong on the hills on the eastern and southern sides.

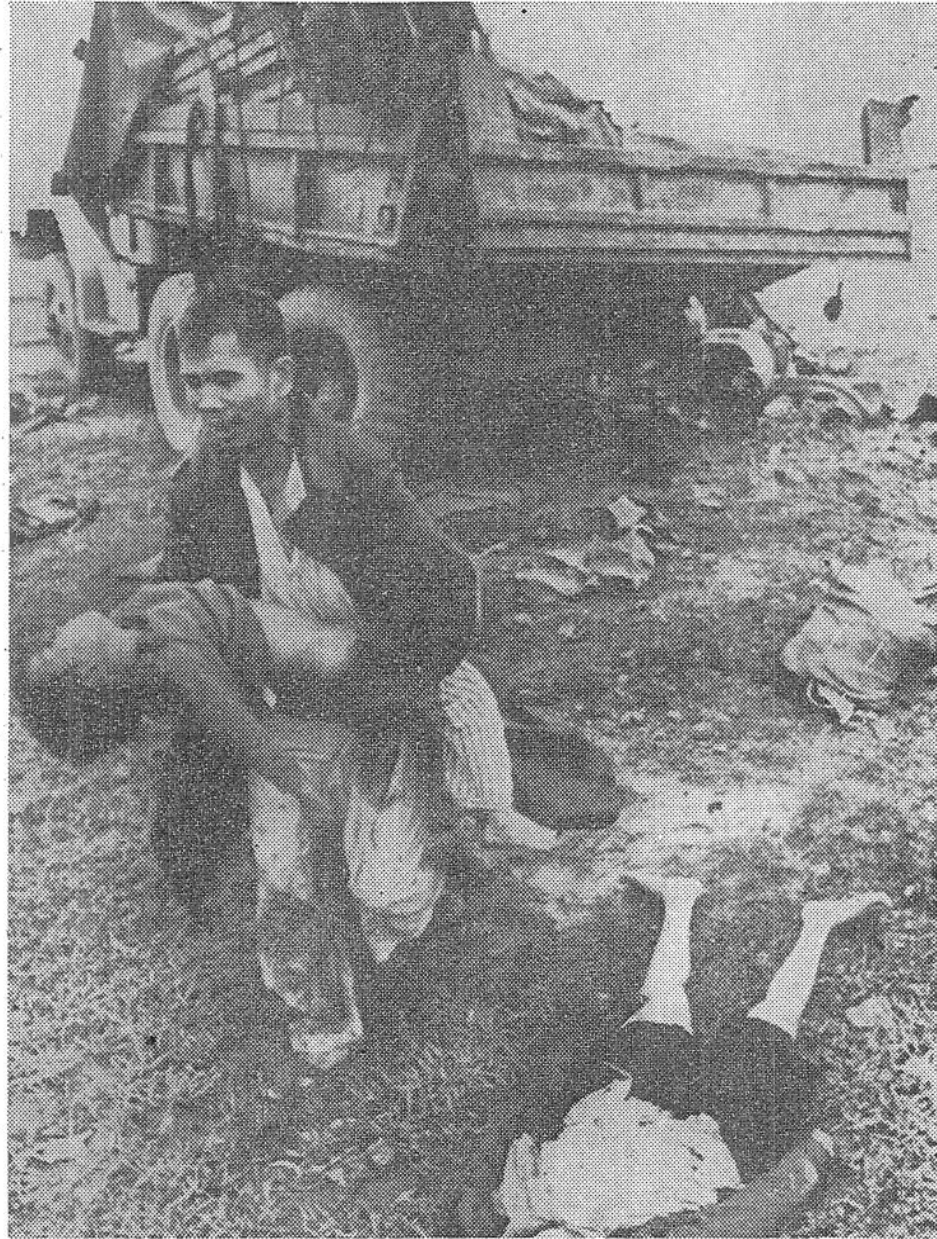
In Kontum itself, the South Vietnamese and their American advisers continued working to improve their defensive system, distributing antitank weapons and digging revetments to protect allied tanks.

American aid officials say Kontum has only a two-day supply of rice. There is plenty of rice on hand in Pleiku, 30 miles to the south, but enemy forces are reported astride the road between the two cities.

SAIGON, Friday, April 29 (AP)—With bad weather hampering air support of South Vietnamese troops at Quangtri, United States fighter-bombers reportedly struck at targets in North Vietnam yesterday with the aim of slowing the enemy attack.

The Hanoi radio said six United States planes and a helicopter had been shot down. It also said that the air raids came within 80 miles of Hanoi, in the Thanhhoa area.

The United States command declined to comment.



United Press International

KILLED BY MINE ON ROAD: The body of a boy being carried by his father from truck that hit a mine outside Quangtri. More than a score of refugees died in such incidents.