

Tank Attacks

Reds Close In On Quang Tri, Threaten Hue

Associated Press

Saigon

Tank-led North Vietnamese forces stepped up a broad offensive in the north yesterday. They smashed South Vietnamese defense lines as they drove close to Quang Tri and overran part of an artillery base guarding Hue to the south.

Their apparent main objective was Hue, the ancient imperial capital that

was partly occupied by the enemy during the 1968 offensive. Hue is 32 miles south of Quang Tri.

Four North Vietnamese divisions, possibly up to 40,000 men, led by columns of tanks, launched the major attack in Quang Tri province. The enemy quickly conquered Dong Ha, 11 miles south of the demilitarized zone and the eastern anchor of the defense line.

The North Vietnamese then drove to within view of Quang Tri and by nightfall had closed in on three sides of the provincial capital 19 miles south of the DMZ.

BASTOGNE

While the peril to Quang Tri grew, other North Vietnamese assaulted Artillery Base Bastogne, 12 miles southwest of Hue on the city's outer defense line. They seized control of more than half of the base in bunker to bunker fighting, according to field reports.

The outpost, manned by troops of South Vietnam's First Division, blocks the only access to Hue by road from the west. The assault appeared to be an attempt to open the highway, called Route 547, so tanks and guns could move up for attacks against Hue.

"The enemy's objective is to capture Hue," Brigadier General Thomas W. Bowen, senior U.S. adviser to the South Vietnamese, said in Hue. "He's got people west of here and they're coming down from the north."

Saigon forces were outnumbered 3 to 1 in the fighting around Quang Tri, Bowen told Associated Press correspondent Holger Jensen.

"The situation is bad," said a U.S. intelligence officer at Hue.

Allied forces fought the enemy onslaught with tanks, naval gunfire and air attacks. There was no solid es-

See Back Page

From Page 1

imate on the number of tanks used in the enemy drive but 11 were reported knocked out.

Thousands of civilians fleeing Quang Tri walked down Highway 1, a vital supply route, toward Hue.

Hundreds of South Vietnamese soldiers were reported to have mingled on Highway 1 with citizens fleeing Quang Tri.

"We have no reports of units breaking up but some soldiers are leaving," a U.S. officer at Hue acknowledged.

SHELLING

The highway was hit by mortar and small-arms fire as far as ten miles south of Quang Tri.

U.S. officers at Hue told Associated Press correspondent Lynn C. Newland that at least one of the enemy's long-range 130mm guns had zeroed in on the road.

Newland said one shell struck a group of refugees Thursday night, killing 15 and wounding an unknown number.

Details of the fighting at Dong Ha, eight miles north of Quang Tri, were sketchy. Newland said reports indicated the enemy assaulted the town with about 20 tanks plus ground troops. The defenders, including South Vietnamese marines and tanks, fell back along Highway 1 to a few miles north of Quang Tri, he said.

Some enemy tanks were reported to have moved southward along the sea-coast to an area ten miles east of Quang Tri. Allied officers said the enemy obviously is trying to encircle and isolate the provincial capital.

command said. None was damaged.

One American helicopter was shot down and the two crewmen were killed after it knocked out three enemy tanks near Quang Tri. A U.S. F-4 fighter - bomber was downed by a missile east of the provincial capital. The two crewmen were rescued from the sea by helicopter.

HIGHLANDS

Enemy forces also kept up their pressure in the Central Highlands, the central coast and near Saigon.

Field reports said there was another sharp clash around Dau Tieng, a one-time rubber plantation center 45 miles northwest of Saigon.

Ninety-two enemy were reported killed in a second day of heavy fighting in the area. The government

forces supported by air attacks and artillery, were reported to have lost 20 men killed or wounded.

An Loc, the provincial capital 60 miles north of Saigon took another 1200 artillery shells, the South Vietnamese command said. Small engagements broke out about the city. Government spokesmen listed three enemy killed and light allied casualties.

Scattered light clashes were reported in the Mekong Delta to the south of Saigon.

In Camodia, the Cambodian High Command reported the embattled town of Kompong Trach, 75 miles southwest of Phnom Penh, was calm. The high command said South Vietnamese forces had reopened one road link to the town from the south.

The North Vietnamese

have made a supreme effort to capture Kompong Trach. It lies athwart an infiltration route into the Mekong Delta.

GUNS

Quang Tri was hit by occasional shells from large enemy guns, which have a range of 17 miles.

General Bowen said the North Vietnamese troops moved to the north and west of Quang Tri in force, with smaller units of about 100 men "all around."

The rising enemy activity in the north brought a corresponding increase in naval and air action. Seven U.S. destroyers off the coast were fired on while the warships were blazing away at enemy targets, the U.S.



UPI Telephoto

A father ran away from the truck, carrying the body of his son