

THOUSANDS FLEE KONTUM IN PANIC AS ENEMY NEARS

MAY 1 1972

Many Are Reported to Bribe
Saigon's Copter Pilots to
Escape Highlands City

VIETCONG PLAN IS CITED

NYTimes

Foe Is Said to Be Aiming
at Raising Flag in Province
Capital for May Day

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Monday, May 1—Thousands of people were reported yesterday to be fleeing in panic from Kontum, a key city in the Central Highlands encircled by North Vietnamese forces.

Military sources said that 10,000 people had been taken by plane or helicopter from Kontum to Pleiku, to the south, over the weekend.

Nuns, priests, military dependents, officials and many military men, including deserters, were among those leaving. All but a dozen Americans were evacuated. Reliable sources in Kontum said in reports telephoned to Saigon that residents were bribing South Vietnamese helicopter pilots the equivalent of \$240 a person to make the 20-minute trip to Pleiku.

Many Also Fleeing Pleiku

The evacuation rush from Pleiku was also intense. Some 800 Vietnamese were said to have obtained space on military planes flying to Saigon Saturday.

Intelligence sources said that North Vietnamese commanders at a village three miles south of Kontum had told the villagers that the flag of the National Liberation Front would be raised over the province headquarters in Kontum today, May Day.

These were the other developments in the military situation:

¶In the northernmost part of the country, the provincial capital of Quangtri was still in Government hands, but Americans in the area said they felt that the city would not be able to hold out much longer against enormous enemy pressure.

¶Another district capital, Hiepduc in Quangtin Province, has fallen to the Communists. The village, defended only by regional militia forces, was the ninth district capital to fall since the Communist offensive began at the end of March. There are nearly 240 districts in South Vietnam, roughly equivalent to American counties, each with its principal town.

¶With two of the fire bases that had protected the approaches to Hue now lost to the Communists, there was growing apprehension that enemy 130-mm. artillery would be in a position to bombard the city. The 130-mm. gun has a range of 17 miles.

¶In the central coastal province of Binhdin, where two district capitals have already fallen, a third is apparently ex-

Situation in North

In Hue, a senior American general said that the situation in Quangtri, the northernmost city still in Government hands, was "tenuous." Details on Page 11.

pected to be occupied by the enemy soon. The American advisory team was evacuated yesterday from the town of Tanquan on the South China Sea coast and withdrawn to a strongpoint called Landing Zone English for a stand. This position reportedly was being heavily shelled yesterday.

¶Military sources said that the Communists controlled most of the northern part of Binhdin Province, where about 100,000 people live.

¶In one of the few optimistic reports of the day, military sources said yesterday that the first civilian convoy in three weeks had succeeded in carrying badly needed supplies of fuel and food from the coastal port of Quinhon to Pleiku in the highlands along Route 19. This main highway had been

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Thousands Flee Kontum As Enemy Pushes Closer

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closed by North Vietnamese forces until two days ago, when the South Korean units responsible for defense of the area finally broke through the road-block.

The siege of Anloc, 60 miles north of Saigon, which began on April 8, continued yesterday with no appreciable change. Authorities calculated that at the present rate of fire, the Communist forces, in another day or two, would have fired 20,000 artillery shells into the town since the beginning of the siege.

In Tayninh Province, northwest of Saigon and adjoining the Province of Binhlong, where the Anloc battle is raging, heavy clashes were reported. Government troops reported having killed hundreds of the enemy in a number of engagements in Tayninh Province and near the town of Godauha, 27 miles northwest of Saigon.

B-52's Fly 28 Missions

Reflecting the intensity of fighting, in which Saigon forces continue to pin much of their hopes on American air support, United States B-52 heavy bombers flew 28 missions over South Vietnam during the day. This was said to have been the highest number of such missions ever recorded on a single day.

Fourteen of the B-52 strikes were in the vicinity of Kontum.

The Air Force announced yesterday that during the period from April 20 to 29, more than 700 sorties were flown by B-52's over North Vietnam.

The Air Force reported having destroyed or damaged more

than 250 enemy trucks, logistics craft and port facilities, 19 bunkers and 16 warehouses, fuel and supply depots, anti-aircraft and coastal artillery sites, and communications lines.

The big bombers were said to have destroyed one MIG-17 fighter plane on the ground.

There was speculation that Saigon itself was due for a wave of terrorist bombing, and possibly infantry assaults similar to the 1968 Tet offensive.

Large enemy forces are within striking distance of the capital and it is known that May is considered by the Communists to be a month of decision.

An intelligence source said yesterday that two North Vietnamese divisions normally assigned to the so-called Skyline Ridge in Laos south of the Plaine des Jarres had left that area.

The source said that it was normal for the North Vietnamese to leave the ridge at this time of year because of the onset of the rainy season and consequent problems of supply.

However, there was also speculation that the North Vietnamese might have abandoned the area this time with the intention of moving into the Kontum area of South Vietnam to strengthen the forces already there.

In Kontum, violence broke out frequently yesterday as frantic South Vietnamese sought rides to safety.

Knife Brandished at American

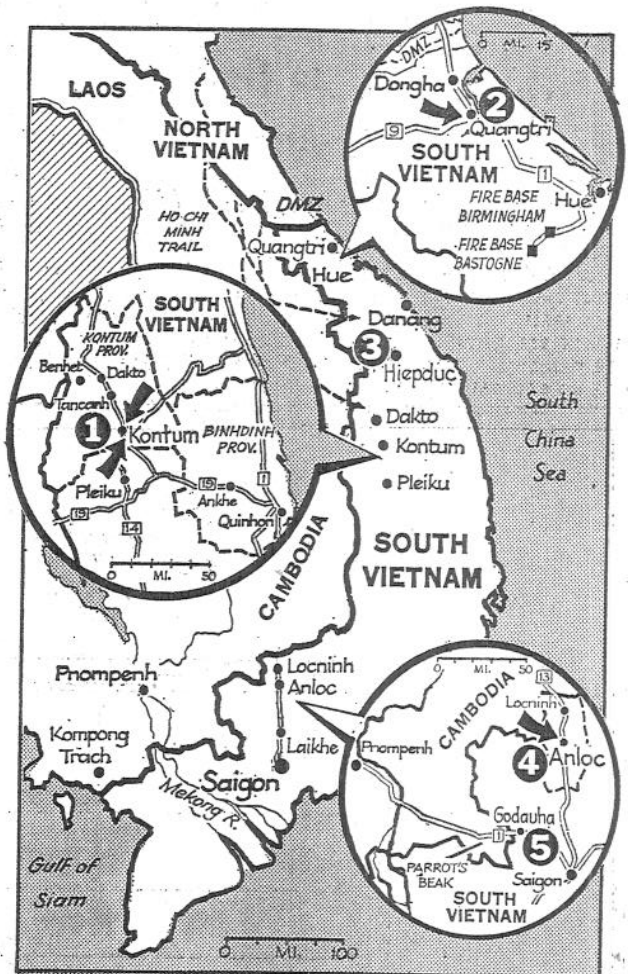
At the American Military Assistance Command's Headquarters compound, one Vietnamese man was subdued after

having brandished a knife at an American Army officer in an effort to get aboard a helicopter.

Hundreds of Army deserters were forcing their way aboard flights headed south, often displacing civilian refugees.

Just south of the town, many

Vietnamese were waiting near a bridge where South Vietnamese Air Force helicopters were landing. The refugees reportedly were paying large bribes to get aboard. Similar bribes were being paid for places aboard transport planes.



The New York Times/May 1, 1972

North Vietnamese moved closer to Kontum (1), which is encircled, and population was fleeing. Quangtri (2) was reported under heavy pressure. District capital of Hiepduc (3) fell to Communists. Beleaguered Anloc (4) has practically no buildings standing. Fighting erupted near Godauha (5), 27 miles northwest of Saigon.