

# How Years Of Effort Collapsed

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## Qui Nhon, South Vietnam

In Binh Dinh province, here on the coast of central Vietnam, three districts with a combined population of about 200,000 have fallen to Communist attacks in two weeks with little real resistance.

Years of work on pacification programs has been dashed, and Vietnamization has failed one of its most crucial tests. The failure is readily conceded by both South Vietnamese and American officials in Qui Nhon, the provincial capital.

A regiment of South Vietnam's army, reduced to a quarter of its 3000-man strength largely through desertions, is under attack near here. Few American advisers or South Vietnamese officials believe it will

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# A VIET COLLAPSE

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pull through.

The unit—the 40th Regiment, fighting at a nearby landing zone named English—has reportedly failed every test it has faced in the last two weeks.

Since the fall of the Hoai Nhon district on April 19, said a high-ranking South Vietnamese official who asked that his name not be disclosed, “the 40th Regiment has only 25 per cent of its strength—30 per cent were casualties and 40 per cent deserted.”

“We lost Hoai Nhon after that because the local militia troops were demoralized. They thought the regular army had let them down. We couldn't hold Hoai Nhon because the soldiers deserted. They left their posts during the night and didn't fight when the attacks came in the day.”

## CAPITAL

Bong Son, the capital of the Hoai Nhon district, fell last Saturday.

“The North Vietnamese are highly motivated — they know what they are doing,” the official continued.

What has been lost in Binh Dinh province? Perhaps the people of the province will tell. More than a fifth of them are now under Communist control, and local Viet Cong agents are said to

be preventing all the able-bodied young men from fleeing south and leaving as some of their women and children have done.

“I was stopped ten times on the road between Bong Son and Qui Nhon,” said a young Roman Catholic priest who had walked 30 miles south.

“The Communists told all the young men they must work to upset President Thieu and establish a new government of neutrality. I told them I was leading the people away because they did not want to be bombed by the Americans.”

A few air attacks were called in on the northern part of Bong Son and also in Hoai Nhon after those places were abandoned, but American advisers say they took such action only in areas where they knew there would be few civilians left.

One of these advisers said he had left Bong Son after the 40th Regiment's commander and the Hoai Nhon district chief took their refrigerators, got in a jeep and fled, leaving their regular and militia troops behind to fend for themselves. Many of the soldiers gave up the fight and took to the hills.

“That whole district now is Communist-controlled,” said the American. “If we were to sweep them out of

there tomorrow, I doubt that we could get the people to tell us who among them had helped the other side. Those people will never feel safe with the government again.”

Many of the people of the captured districts — the third is Tam Quan — have stayed there, or have gone back after fleeing the fighting. The region is, on the coastal plain and the rice crop will soon be ready for harvest.

“There's usually a 25 per cent surplus of rice in Hoai Nhon,” one of the advisers said. “You know who'll get it now.”

Major George H. Watkins Jr., one of the three Americans, was among the last to leave Bong Son, a town of 40,000 before it fell Saturday afternoon. He said:

“The Americans were sincere; they tried to help the Vietnamese armed forces, and they brought equipment here. But one thing the Americans cannot bring here is leadership — they cannot bring that in from their arsenal.

“When the Communists were here before, from 1945 to 1954, the people didn't have much to eat or good clothes on their backs but morally they were happy, because the Communists brought justice to this land for ten years, not the corruption we have here now.”