

Red Tank Strength Now Placed at 600

WASHINGTON — (AP) — U.S. analysts estimate the North Vietnamese army has sent as many as 600 Soviet-built tanks into the Indochina war.

This is about twice the estimate used by defense officials a month ago and apparently represents a refinement of intelligence since the big enemy spring offensive against South Vietnam began in late March.

South Vietnamese and U.S. military authorities have claimed the destruction of well over 250 enemy tanks and other heavy tracked vehicles such as self-propelled artillery.

Some of these destruction claims, particularly by the South Vietnamese, are regarded with skepticism by certain U.S. analysts, although they acknowledge that South Vietnamese soldiers have scored well with

a light U.S.-supplied anti-tank rocket.

North Vietnamese use of armor and heavy artillery on a major scale for the first time in the war contributed significantly to enemy gains earlier in the offensive, particularly in the rout of the South Vietnamese Third Infantry Division at Quang Tri.

By now, a senior U.S. general said, "the South Vietnamese have gotten over the psychological shock of fighting eye to eye with tanks."

Rocket-firing U.S. helicopters and fighter planes have become more effective against North Vietnam's tanks as air crews have gained experience in dealing with them, the general said.