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Anloc Pins Its Hopes on Relief Column

By **CRAIG R. WHITNEY**

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LAIKHE, South Vietnam, May 31—Sgt. 1st Cl. Jesse Yearta and a dozen other American advisers living in bunkers under the surrounded town of Anloc formed a betting pool weeks ago on when a Government relief column would push through to break the siege, now 55 days old, and enable the thousands of wounded Vietnamese soldiers there to get out. No one has won.

Sergeant Yearta, who had bet his red beard that the column would be in Anloc today, shaved it off because he lost. Later he was flown out by a special American helicopter task force after 46 days under siege.

"There's another bet on that we'll outlast the siege of Dienbienphu," the sergeant said, referring to the French position that held out for 57 days in 1954. "We're working hard on that one now."

Conversations with South Vietnamese and American officers here and along Route 13 south of Anloc make it seem unlikely that the relief column will get through soon. The backbone of the South Vietnamese defenses—air power—has been paralyzed for two days by clouds and rain, and the monsoon season

is just beginning.

"We'll get there sooner or later," said Capt. Nguyen Thu, a rear-echelon officer of the relief force, the 21st division, here in Laikhe, 35 miles south of Anloc. "Right now Kontum has first priority for air, so I guess we must wait."

The 12,000-man division was sent north on the highway from its usual area of operations in the far south on April 9. It has suffered hundreds of casualties but has made no substantial progress in opening the highway from Chonthan, 15 miles south of Anloc. Today the Government forces were where they were a week ago—just north of Chonthan and at two cut-off positions along the highway two miles and seven miles south of Anloc.

American advisers can occasionally and with great difficulty be airlifted in and out of Anloc, which has been almost destroyed by weeks of intense North Vietnamese shelling and American and South Vietnamese bombing.

The thousands of South Vietnamese from an airborne division, the Fifth, and a ranger group—more than half of them are wounded—cannot get out unless the relief column gets through, and they know it, according to Sergeant Yearta and Spe-

cialist James A. Takata, who came out with him.

"We're all waiting for a relief column," said Specialist Takata, a Japanese-American from Hawaii. He wiped red dust from his camouflaged fatigues and sat down to his first meal at a table since he went into Anloc 31 days ago.

'Just Holding On'

"We're just holding on where we are," he said. "We can't move out of the bunkers. All we're doing now is waiting."

Sergeant Yearta, who is from Silver City, N.M., said: "Medevac is a big problem, and it's holding up the entire operation now." As for the hundreds of wounded, he said: "They are dying. The Vietnamese Air Force won't come in and get them out."

The sergeant would not explain what he meant by "holding up the entire operation," but other sources at Laikhe said the encircled soldiers were refusing to leave their bunkers because they were afraid that if they were wounded they would die for lack of medical treatment or from infection, which is rampant among the wounded.

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