

Bunker Says Civilian Toll Runs Higher Than at Tet

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By TAD SZULC JUN 16 1972

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WASHINGTON, June 15—Ellsworth Bunker, the American Ambassador to Saigon, has reported to Washington that South Vietnam's civilian casualties in the current fighting are running far ahead of those in the 1968 Tet offensive.

The report on the civilian victims, providing for the first time a fairly detailed picture of the impact of the North Vietnamese offensive on South Vietnamese society, was contained in a telegram sent to Secretary of State William P. Rogers by Mr. Bunker last Sunday.

The telegram also estimated that the number of civilian war casualties admitted to South Vietnamese hospitals in the second part of 1972 would be double the total in the first six months of the year. A copy of

the telegram, which was not classified, was obtained today by The New York Times.

The report emphasized that all the figures were incomplete and did not cover the April civilian casualties in the severe battles around Quangtri, Kontum and Anloc. It said that 23,463 war victims were admitted to hospitals in the first five months of the year, including 4,038 women and 2,942 children under the age of 13.

The incomplete hospital admissions figure for April was set at 8,699, three times the February number. These statistics relate only to war casualties.

While the embassy said that "It remains patently impossible

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to document the number of civilian casualties of war killed outright" or dead after admission to hospitals, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees, said in a statement today that his panel estimated that "as many as 25,000 deaths" had occurred since the enemy offensive began March 30.

The Massachusetts Democrat said his subcommittee calculated that the total civilian war casualties in South Vietnam since March 30 stood near 80,000.

Senator Kennedy said the Agency for International Development, which is responsible for refugee care in South Vietnam, had informed him that the number of new refugees had risen by 100,000 since May 8.

He said that the fighting was generating an average of 3,000 refugees a day and that "based on unreported data, including displaced persons in enemy controlled territory, the subcommittee estimates up to 1.2 million new refugees since April 1."

Tet Figures Noted

Administration officials said it was impossible to determine what percentage of war casualties and refugees was caused by North Vietnamese and Vietcong action and what percentage by the activities of South Vietnamese forces and American tactical bombings and strafings.

Ambassador Bunker's report said that the Tet, or lunar new year, offensive by the Communists led to an average increase of 37.3 per cent in monthly hospital admissions in the six-month period after the fighting in February and March of 1968. The admissions in April and May of this year "appear proportionately greater than initial increases following the Tet 1968 offensive," it went on.

"It appears reasonable to assume that the next six-month period will show a monthly average substantially in excess of the 37.7 per cent."

The report said that "a 100 per cent increase, or estimate of 5,400 civilian war casualties admissions to Ministry of Health hospitals, through the end of the calendar year is a reasonable maximum planning figure." The reported February admissions figure was 2,659.

'The Human Cost of Communism' - 'If the North takes over the South, what will the bloodbath be?'

by Sir Robert Thompson, NYTimes 15 Jun 72, filed Indochina/Comment.