

Quang Tri Citadel Attack-- Saigon Troops Fail to Gain

Saigon

Heavy fighting continued around Quang Tri yesterday but the South Vietnamese drive to isolate the walled Citadel in the heart of the city was at a standstill.

Saigon command spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Le Trung Hien admitted the elite marine division has made "no significant progress" in its push to recapture the capital of the country's northernmost province, which fell to the enemy May 1.

The marines are trying to cut off the Citadel from supplies and reinforcements by occupying western sections of the city along the Thach Han river.

HOUSES

Associated Press correspondent Holger Jensen reported that long-range North Vietnamese guns zeroed in on the marines as they fought their way from one shattered house to another. They also were hampered by an assortment of booby traps, intended for the enemy, that were laid by the South Vietnamese paratroopers they replaced in Quang Tri last week.

U.S. Phantom jets and A-6 Intruders flying in support of the marines knocked out six North Vietnamese tanks on the fringes of the city, the U.S. Command announced.

The Saigon command reported 100 North Vietnamese killed in Quang Tri in the last 48 hours and early reports put government casualties at two dead and 24 wounded.

DELTA

Two other major engagements were reported in separate areas of the country—the Mekong Delta and the

region near the provincial capital of An Loc.

In the northern sector of the delta, south of Saigon, government forces backed by air and artillery support claimed killing 77 enemy troops. They also reported finding the bodies of 25 other North Vietnamese killed by U.S. B-52 strikes.

It was one of the heaviest battles recently in the desolate Plain of Reeds, where Communist-led forces are said to be preparing for a drive to sever Highway 4 and cut off the capital from its delta rice bowl. As many as seven North Vietnamese regiments—about 7000 men—have infiltrated the area from neighboring Cambodia since the enemy offensive began four months ago.

BUNKERS

South Vietnamese infantrymen on Highway 13 between Saigon and An Loc flushed out the last enemy troops from a network of bunkers on an old American fire base along the road. Military sources say the route linking Saigon and the provincial capital, 60 miles to the north, would be reopened soon. The highway has been closed for 119 days but South Vietnamese military sources report only small pockets of resistance remain.

American aircraft made more than 230 fighter-bomber attacks Thursday against storage facilities and the communications network in North Vietnam, the U.S. Command reported. Cloud cover kept American planes away from the Hanoi and Haiphong areas for the third day and the strikes were concentrated in the southern part of the country.

The command also reported 329 air strikes were made

against enemy forces in South Vietnam. B-52 bombers flew 29 missions, more than half of them against North Vietnamese concentrations around Quang Tri.

Hanoi claimed two U.S. planes were shot down Wednesday and Thursday over Nghe An Province in North Vietnam.

Associated Press