

BATTLE DEVELOPS TO EAST OF SAIGON

AUG 9 1972

Fight 17 Miles From Capital
Closest in Foe's Drive—
South's Losses Heavy

NYTimes

By The Associated Press

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, Aug. 9—South Vietnamese soldiers reportedly fought enemy forces in rubber plantations 17 miles east of Saigon yesterday and early reports from the field said that Government casualties were heavy.

It was the closest major fighting to the capital since the North Vietnamese opened their offensive more than four months ago.

The fighting occurred in an area about two miles northeast of the district town of Longthanh. Government reinforcements were sent to the town to block an enemy threat to Route 15, which links Saigon with the resort city of Vungtau. Sources said that the highway remained open but indicated that travel along it might be hazardous.

United States and South Vietnamese aircraft were called in to support the Government ground forces with bombing and strafing attacks.

South Vietnamese troops

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were hit hard by mortars and automatic fire. Thirty to 40 soldiers were reported killed and at least as many wounded. The fighting tapered off at dusk and more wounded were lifted out by Government helicopters, the reports added.

Enemy casualties were not immediately determined.

Government militiamen made the first contact with the enemy in the area on Monday during a routine sweep. They called for reinforcements when it became apparent they had stumbled upon a larger force than they could handle.

Elsewhere in the war, United States jets struck again at enemy troop evacuations in eastern Cambodia in an attempt to blunt the new tank-led offen-

sive, American military sources reported.

Cambodian units, fighting against armor for the first time in the war, were reported to have been driven from a large section of Kompong Trabek. The devastated town on the main road between Saigon and Phnompenh is 50 miles southeast of the Cambodian capital.

A major enemy victory in the region would open the way for an assault on the northern part of South Vietnam's Mekong Delta and threaten to cut off Saigon from its main rice supply.

Cambodia's President, Lon Nol, flew to the battle zone and conferred with Cambodian and South Vietnamese military commanders. It was the first visit that the President, partly paralyzed by a stroke, has made to the battlefield this year.

At about the same time he touched down at the Government base of Neak Luong, 30 miles southeast of Phnompenh, enemy troops backed by tanks cut a stretch of Route 1 only six miles away.

The tank attack isolated the remnants of a brigade of elite Cambodian soldiers near the town of Kompong Soeung. Government armored personnel carriers abandoned an effort to rescue the troops and instead formed a defensive ring around the village for the night.

There have been reports of other enemy tanks heading for two provincial capitals southeast of Phnompenh. One group of about 30 tanks was said to



The New York Times/Aug. 9, 1972

Fighting erupted near Saigon at Longthanh (1). In Cambodia, Government troops were reported in retreat from parts of Kampong Trabek (2 below). There were new clashes near Hue and Quangtri (3).

have been seen heading for Preyveng, 29 miles south of the capital, and another group of 30 sighted near Svayrieng, 40 miles farther south.

Svayrieng has been surrounded since mid-April and a military spokesman reported that North Vietnamese gunners shot down a helicopter loaded with refugees being evacuated from the city. The copter exploded in the air with at least 10 persons aboard, the spokesman said.

More than 2,000 South Vietnamese rangers have been sent into Cambodia. They clashed with North Vietnamese units 11 miles southeast of Kompong Trabek on Monday, killing two of the enemy and uncovering four tons of ammunition, the Saigon command announced.

In three days of strafing and bombing, in eastern Cambodia, military sources reported United States Marine and Air Force planes have knocked out at least 14 Soviet built T-54 tanks, blasted bunkers and fortified emplacements, and set off fires and secondary explosions in fuel and ammunition dumps.

On South Vietnam's northern front, enemy artillery was estimated to have fired 300 rounds into Government positions around Quangtri. There were no reports on South Vietnamese casualties.

Meantime the Saigon command said that six soldiers were killed and a T-54 tank destroyed by marine and airborne units fighting to recapture the city.

United States B-52 bombers, F-4 Phantoms and carrier-based aircraft flew scores of missions in support of South Vietnamese troops around Quangtri, destroying four tanks, bunkers and gun emplacements.

A United States communique said that the strikes raised to 10 the number of enemy tanks destroyed in the last week by American planes on the northern front.

The Seventh Fleet's guided missile cruiser, Providence, and three destroyers also pounded North Vietnamese positions around Quangtri.

In fighting further south, around two hilltop positions near Hue known as Checkmate and Bastogne, 21 of the enemy were killed, the Saigon command announced. The former

imperial capital was hit by nine 122-mm artillery shells and one civilian was wounded, the command added.

Two Americans were slightly wounded in separate actions, the United States command reported, one by a booby trap nine miles southwest of Danang and the other during a shelling attack in Longthanh district, 20 miles east of Saigon.

Peking Plans Geneva Office

GENEVA, Aug. 8—The United Nations announced today that China had given notice of her intention to establish a permanent diplomatic mission here. The mission will be accredited to the United Nations Geneva office and to other international organizations with headquarters in Switzerland.