

S. Viet Fire Base

SAIGON — (AP) — North Vietnamese supported by artillery overran a South Vietnamese fire base and district headquarters to seize control of the western half of the strategic Que Son Valley south of Da Nang, field reports said today.

The gains give the North Vietnamese a springboard for assaults eastward toward Highway 1 and the populous central coast including Da Nang, South Vietnam's second largest city.

South Vietnamese forces battled yesterday in an attempt to reopen Highway 1 east of Saigon and two other highways cut near the capital by enemy troops.

10 Tanks KO'd

On the northern front, as many as 10 enemy tanks were reported knocked out in fighting around Quang Tri City.

Officers in the field said the enemy assault in the Que Son Valley will force the South Vietnamese to divert some attention from the northern fighting.

"Now the South Vietnamese will have to look to their rear as opposed to concentrating their efforts in Hue and Quang Tri," one officer said. Referring to the Da Nang region, he added: "They've got problems here, too."

Hue is 50 miles north of Da Nang and Quang Tri is 30 miles farther north. The South Vietnamese launched a 20,000-man counter-offensive last June 28 aimed at regaining territory lost in Quang Tri province, which fell to the enemy May 1.

Artillery Used

The attacking forces in the Que Son Valley were backed by 130mm artillery. It was the first reported use in the Da Nang area of the big Soviet-built guns, which have a range of 17 miles.

The assault began Friday night and the intense shelling drove the South Vietnamese from Que Son district headquarters a few

hours later. Que Son is 25 miles south of Da Nang.

Early Saturday, the North Vietnamese launched a ground assault against Fire Base Ross, about a half mile west of Que Son, and in less than two hours controlled two-thirds of the base.

During the day Saturday, the pressure against Ross mounted. As the South Vietnamese were preparing to launch a counteroffensive with reinforcements, the regimental headquarters at Ross abandoned the rest of the base for unexplained reasons, field reports said.

Casualty Report

Preliminary field reports said South Vietnamese casualties were 22 men killed and 130 wounded at Ross. They said 159 North Vietnamese troops were killed, 119 of them inside the perimeter of the base in hand-to-hand fighting.

Two 130mm guns were destroyed and one was damaged by U.S. and South Vietnamese bombers in the vicinity of Hiep Duc, southwest of Ross, the field reports said.

There were no casualty figures for Que Son district.

Several American advisers were with the South Vietnamese but there were no casualties among them, the field reports said.

The cities of Hue and Da Nang came under shelling attacks again while the U.S. Command reported that American bombers flew more than 250 strikes over North Vietnam on Friday, hitting communication and supply lines and fuel depots.

The command also reported the loss on Thursday of a Navy A7 fighter-bomber to an enemy missile 29 miles southwest of Haiphong. The pilot was listed as missing.

It raised to 78 the number of U.S. planes lost and to 85 the number of airmen missing since full-scale bombing of the North resumed April 6.