

AUG 23 1972

8 NYTimes

C

FIGHTING LESSENS IN QUESON REGION

Enemy Said to Have Opened a Major New Front There

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, Aug. 23—Opposing North and South Vietnamese forces, exhausted by heavy casualties, were reported yesterday to have settled for the moment along a loose battle line northeast of the district capital of Queson, which fell to the Communists on Saturday.

Shelling and skirmishing along the line continued yesterday, but neither side was apparently ready to attempt a strong new initiative.

It was clear, however, that the enemy had opened a major new front far to the south of the main action in Quangtri, South Vietnam's northernmost province, bypassing centers of Government strength ringing the cities of Hue and Danang.

As the situation now stands, enemy troops hold Queson and nearby Base Camp Ross, about 25 miles south of Danang. In their assault, enemy lines forced South Vietnamese troops to the northeast along Route 535.

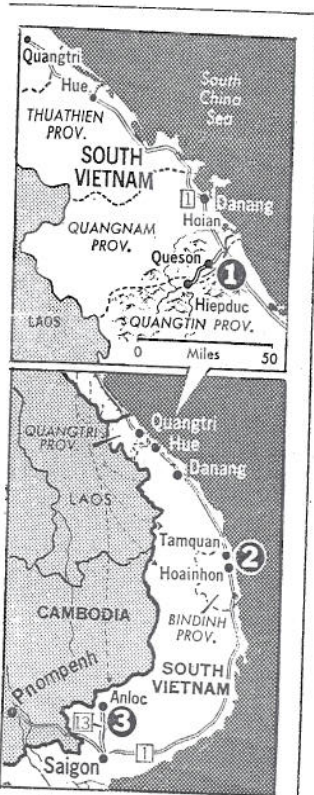
Saigon announced that a counterattack had been made, but by yesterday evening both sides were apparently stalled at a point along Route 535 roughly midway between Queson and the Government position at Camp Baldy 11 miles to the northeast.

"Quangtri-Type Campaign"

"It's going to take some time for both sides to lick their wounds and regroup," a military source said. "This has all the looks of a new Quangtri-type campaign, proceeding in bloody fits and starts with long pauses in between."

The big surprise, military sources in the area say, was the fact that the North Vietnamese succeeded in moving 130mm. heavy artillery into the area without detection.

"Our intelligence just didn't



The New York Times/Aug. 23, 1972

Saigon units skirmished with enemy along a line northeast of Queson (1). Heavy fighting flared in the Tamquan area (2) and just outside Anloc (3).

help us on that, and the 130's were a nasty surprise," one official said. "As far as we can tell, the opposition did not bring any new troop units in for their offensive."

"For a long time various independent Communist units had been operating along the border between Quangtin and Quangnam provinces, and four or five months ago they were consolidated into what is now the 711th Division—the outfit that hit us at Queson," he said.

"They must have been stockpiling supplies for some time, but we never saw those big guns as they were moved up under the trees."

The official said that since the enemy's capture last spring of Hiepduc, a district capital southwest of Queson, "there has been practically no friendly presence all the way to the Laos border." This has meant that ground patrols were unable to operate effectively in the area to spot Communist movement.

New Fighting Reported

Since the fall of the provincial capital of Quangtri in May, Government forces have concentrated efforts on driving the North Vietnamese there northward.

The enemy has resisted this counterthrust, but all the while has been deepening its penetration, sliding south along the exposed western flank of the Saigon troops. It successively threatened Hue from the southwest and then Danang, also from the southwest.

During the past 24 hours, Saigon communiqués have reported heavy clashes and shelling along most of the 100-mile arc from Quangtri to Queson.

Farther to the south, intense new fighting was reported in Binh Dinh Province around the district capitals of Tamquan and Hoainhom, which were recaptured recently by Saigon troops. Saigon listed 23 of the enemy killed in the actions, putting its own toll at two killed and 26 wounded.