

Saigon Says Its Marines Fought Way Into Quangtri's Citadel in 2d Attempt to Capture City

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SAIGON, South Vietnam,

Wednesday, Sept. 13—South Vietnamese marines fought their way into the walled Citadel in Quangtri city Monday night, a South Vietnamese military spokesman said. The marines reportedly took up where paratroopers left off July 28, after the first attempt to recapture the town from the North Vietnamese.

Reports from Quangtri said that a force of about 100 South Vietnamese marines had gained a foothold on the east edge of the square-shaped Citadel, which was lost in the North Vietnamese invasion May 1.

Late in June, President Nguyen Van Thieu vowed to recapture Quangtri Province within three months. As his deadline approached—it is next Tuesday — commanders sent fresh troops into the battle last week and Monday night. According to the Saigon command, a company of marines breached the east wall through a bomb hole and dug in.

The North Vietnamese reportedly responded with intense shelling from artillery positions

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South Vietnamese soldiers watching smoke rise from an air strike against the foe during fighting for Quangtri

Associated Press

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in the hills of western Quangtri Province, which they control.

[United Press International said that a newsmen who had been within 100 yards of the Citadel reported that South Vietnamese inside the fortress were coming under rifle fire from atop the 15 foot walls as a push was begun toward enemy bunkers in the western part. More Saigon marines were said to have scaled the eastern wall to join in the push.]

The South Vietnamese military spokesman said that the marines were hit by 1,600 rounds of artillery and mortar fire just outside the Citadel Monday but asserted that they suffered relatively light casualties—24 killed and 87 wounded since early Sunday afternoon. The North Vietnamese have defended the Citadel mainly by artillery fire.

American military sources in Saigon appeared to be uninformed about the progress of the latest attempt to recapture



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Saigon troops reportedly entered Quangtri Citadel from the east (1). Foe's pressure on Hue (2) was said to have eased. U.S. jets struck Haiphong area (3) and north of Hanoi.

the Citadel. The United States command was unable last night to confirm reports that the marines were inside.

Saigon said it had retaken the Quangtri Citadel on July 25. It turned out to be a false claim, and the airborne troops that had been battling for the Citadel for a month were withdrawn on July 28. The marines then took over their mission but until now have not been reported inside the Citadel walls.

Best Units Involved

The airborne and marine divisions are from a mobile force of Saigon's best units that has borne the brunt of most of the heavy fighting in Quangtri.

An American officer in Danang said that North Vietnamese pressure on the southwest flank of Hue, south of Quangtri, had diminished in recent weeks because the enemy's 324-B Division had been "creamed" by Saigon's First Infantry Division, which has been battling there since March.

The First Division's commander, Maj. Gen. Pham Van Phu, took advantage of the lull to go to Conghoa military hospital outside Saigon for treatment of tuberculosis.

"It's not over," said the American officer in Danang. "They've given up on trying to get through southwest of Hue, but they will probably strike again somewhere else with another of their divisions. We're just waiting to find out where the somewhere else will be."

New Attacks Expected

The North Vietnamese have been using their control of most of Quangtri and western provinces to infiltrate men and supplies South toward Hue and are believed to be preparing for new attacks.

The South Vietnamese, meanwhile, have been losing ground in the Queson valley to the southwest of Hue and heavy fighting continued Monday in Tienphuoc District there, according to the Saigon command.

American air crews continued their heavy bombing of North Vietnam with more than 300 air strikes Monday, the United States command said. Roads, rail lines, and army barracks were reported bombed from 120 miles north of Hanoi to the southern panhandle. No strikes were reported in Hanoi.

Two Navy F-4 Phantom jets were lost Monday near Haiphong, but all four crew members were rescued, the command reported. One jet was hit by a missile, the other crashed because of unknown causes, the command said.