

3-Day Attack

S. Viet HQ Falls to Reds

Examiner News Services

SAIGON — North Vietnamese forces tonight overran the South Vietnamese district headquarters of Ba To, 105 miles south of Da Nang, at the climax of a three-day offensive that opened new Communist threats to the coastal areas, military sources said.

The sources said militia-men gave up the government headquarters inside the town after 72 hours of intense shellfire followed by a large-scale ground attack. Fate of the rest of the town was unknown.

The sources told UPI reporter Edward Bassett that the South Vietnamese still control several areas in the district (county) around Ba To including a key hill overlooking the town. But the situation was so serious he was warned not to visit certain areas of the new fighting zone.

"As long as they have that key position they have Ba To," one military source told Bassett. The town and the district headquarters were defended by militia but the key hill is still held by South Vietnamese Rangers.

Farther to the north near Tien Phuoc, about 40 miles south of Da Nang, U.S. jets today reported destroying a North Vietnamese 130-mm artillery position. The huge guns have a range of 17 miles.

Earlier today South Vietnamese infantry men fought their way through two North Vietnamese ambushes along coastal Highway 1 to reinforce embattled militia-men defending a Mo Duc district town. The town is about 90 miles south of Da Nang and 15 miles northeast of Ba To.

For the first time in the war, the United States is employing its biggest computerized gunships with television cameras to protect Saigon against anticipated enemy attacks in the weeks preceding the U.S. presidential election.

Air Force AC130 gunships, armed with low-light television cameras that can pierce the night skies, have been orbiting over Saigon for the past three weeks, informants said.

The four-engine gunships, armed with 40-mm and 20-mm cannon, are supported by ground television stations in the Saigon military region. When enemy movement is spotted, they open fire.

The use of the giant gunships underscores the seriousness with which U.S. officials take the threat to Saigon, and their determination to preclude attacks that could embarrass President Nixon in his bid for re-election.

Senior U.S. Air Force officials also indicated that if Nixon is re-elected without a negotiated settlement having been reached, the air war against North Vietnam likely would intensify.

U.S. tactical fighter-bombers carried out heavy raids across North Vietnam yesterday, launching more than 330 strikes, at the same time Hanoi was holding a ceremony for the release of three American pilots who had been captured.

The U.S. Command announced the loss of three more planes over North Vietnam and said four of the six crewmen are missing.

The latest losses raised to 98 the number of American jets lost over North Vietnam since the resumption of full-scale bombing last April 6, the command said.