

Key S. Viet Bastion

Falls to Red Forces

SF Examiner
Long-Held OCT 13 1972

Outpost Falls

SAIGON — (AP) — North Vietnamese forces today overran the Ben Het border camp in the central highlands, a legacy from the Green Berets that had withstood years of assaults.

A two-day attack drove South Vietnamese forces from the camp for the first time in the war. This coupled with increased attacks in other parts of the Highlands apparently signaled a renewal there of the offensive the North Vietnamese launched 6½ months ago.

The Saigon Command said that two days of heavy shelling, in which at least 1500 rounds of heavy artillery rounds, rockets and mortar rounds hit Ben Het, destroyed the defenders' artillery and ammunition and a food warehouse.

Radio contact was lost with the camp last night after units of the 320th North Vietnamese Division launched a ground assault, the chief spokesman for the Saigon command, Lt. Col. Le Trung Hien, said.

More than 100 strikes by American and South Vietnamese fighter - bombers and U.S. B52 bombers failed to drive off the North Vietnamese.

Hien said about 140 of the camp's 300-man garrison were spotted by observation.

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planes southwest of the base and contact had been made with them.

Initial reports from the field said that more than 60 of the Ben Het garrison were killed and more than 120 wounded.

Most of the men were Montagnards — mountain tribesmen — and many had their families living in the camp.

Kontum City

The mountaintop camp is 30 miles northwest of Kontum City and just east of the tri-border region where South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos meet. It was established as an observation post to track North Vietnamese infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos.

Ben Het has been virtually surrounded by the North Vietnamese for years, and periodically the enemy has laid siege. But this is the first time it has fallen.

When the Green Berets of the U.S. Special Forces were in Vietnam, they led and trained the camp's garrison of Montagnards. The camp was turned over to the South Vietnamese on Jan. 4, 1971, but most of the Montagnards signed up as rangers and

stayed on at the camp.

Fighting around Ben Het and Dak To in the spring of 1969 was considered the first major test of the South Vietnamese forces to defend themselves without massive American infantry support, although they still had U.S. artillery aid.

The camp held through three months of fighting, and Saigon claimed nearly 2000 North Vietnamese were killed. But 40 Americans and more than 200 South Vietnamese were killed and more than 1000 South Vietnamese were wounded.

Two American advisers had been at the camp most of the past summer, but they were pulled out during the past two weeks, the U.S. Command said. It explained that advisers are being withdrawn from the lower levels of command such as the battalion-size unit at Ben Het.

Capability

Meanwhile, the U.S. Command postponed the transfer of 18 attack planes to the South Vietnamese and the departure of the 170 American personnel manning them because of the Communist threat to the Saigon area and the Mekong Delta to the south.

"We wish to retain a cer-

tain level of operational capability and we are doing that," said a spokesman for the U.S. Command. "We have frozen the standdown."

He did not elaborate, but other sources said increased enemy activity in the Saigon region and the delta was the reason.

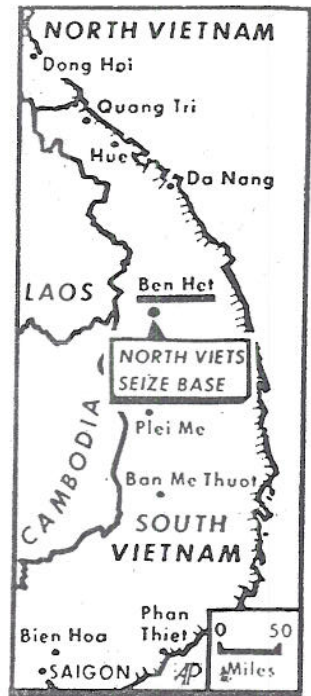
The Air Force's Eighth Special Operations Squadron of 24 A37 subsonic attack planes was deactivated Oct. 1, but 18 of the planes and 170 of the airmen were reorganized into a detachment. They resumed missions Thursday, the command said.

Sources estimated the freeze would continue for at least a month and possibly until Dec. 1.

The planes were scheduled to be turned over to the South Vietnamese for activation of a squadron. The sources said other A37s coming into the country would go to the South Vietnamese air force instead.

Swing Wings

In the air war against North Vietnam, the U.S. Command announced that swing-wing F111 fighter bombers attacked targets along North Vietnam's northwest and northeast rail



South Vietnamese were driven from their border camp at Ben Het by foe.

lines to China Wednesday night.

But in the aftermath of the destruction of the French diplomatic headquarters in Hanoi during an American air raid earlier Wednesday, the F111s attacked no closer to the North Vietnamese capital than 10 miles, it was reported.