

# Heavy Ground Fighting Continues Over Vietnam

## Struggle For Roads, Hamlets

Washington Post Service

Saigon

The first day of the peace in South Vietnam was very much like the last few days of the war.

Sustained fighting including air attacks and artillery barrages, was reported throughout the day in all four of the country's military regions. South Vietnamese troops, backed by all their usual weapons except U.S. bombing, fought to reopen roads and retake hamlets that had been seized by the communists in a last-minute surge Saturday night.

### FIGHTING

(A United Press dispatch reported that South Vietnamese military sources said Communist troops captured 66 hamlets in the 11 provinces around Saigon between the time the cease-fire started yesterday morning and mid-afternoon. The Communists also attacked 29 other hamlets but were driven out.

(Heavy fighting was reported as close as 20 miles from Saigon on Highway 13 and within 30 miles of the capital along Highway 1. Battles also were going on further north along Highway 1 at Tam Quan, 290 miles north of Saigon, after the truce deadline.

(Official and unofficial reports showed 1282 North and South Vietnamese killed in the last 24 hours of the war,

said United Press.)

### CASUALTIES

All the dismal sights of the war that was supposed to be over reappeared throughout the day — wounded children, burning houses, stretcher bearers carrying the casualties, refugees scurrying away from the fighting clutching a few possessions.

Late last night, 16 hours after the cease-fire negotiated in Paris officially took effect, the distant rumble of artillery fire could still be heard in Saigon.

It was difficult to tell from

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the reports trickling in from around the country how long the fighting would go on. Each side claimed to be observing the terms of the cease-fire agreement, which required the troops to stop shooting and remain where they were as of 8 a.m. local time yesterday. Sources said it was likely that the fighting would begin to taper off today after some last-minute counter-punching.

### CHANGES

Even if the fighting continues for some time, there was abundant evidence that South Vietnam has entered, if not a time of peace, at least a new era in its history:

- Viet Cong flags were reported to be flying in full view of main roads in the Mekong delta, indicating that in some areas, at least, the political phase that South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu has been predicting was already begun.

- The U.S. grounded its warplanes in Vietnam and began pulling its troops in from outlying posts in preparation for their departure.

- A plane carrying Viet Cong prisoners of war land-

ed at Tan Son Nhut. Reliable sources said the prisoners had been flown in from an offshore prison island in preparation for their release as part of the peace agreement.

### DUALISM

There was a curious dualism about the events of the first day that made it difficult to judge the real trend of events. To a reporter who spent the day at the airport and saw incoming flights of the peace-keeping teams, the Viet Cong prisoners about to be released and the preparations for a complete U.S. pullout, it looked as if the war was over.

But a reporter who went out of Saigon to the battle zones could quickly see that the fighting was going to continue at least throughout the day and perhaps longer.

Fighting along Highway 1 cut off Saigon from the province capital of Tay Ninh, which the Communists apparently tried unsuccessfully to capture on Saturday night.

### IMPORTANCE

Tay Ninh is a nondescript town of little intrinsic interest, but it has both strategic and symbolic importance. It is astride a main transportation route just a few miles from the Cambodian border and would be useful to the Communists as a supply point if they wanted to use it that way. And it is the Holy See of Cao Dai, a major Vietnamese religious sect whose leaders have been less than enthusiastic in their support for the Thieu government.

Heavy fighting was also reported in Thua Thien province just north of Hue near the northern front, in the resort city of Da Lat, and along the border between Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces on the central coast, an area where the Communists have been politically and militarily potent for many years.