

Lag in Effect in Highlands Region Seen

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE

Special to The New York Times

PLEIKU, South Vietnam, May 19—The senior American adviser to Saigon's hard-pressed forces in the Central Highlands said today that it would take several months before President Nixon's decision to mine the Haiphong harbor would have any effect on the campaign here.

The drive by the North Vietnamese through the highlands, across the waist of South Vietnam, has reached a critical phase and is likely to be settled in less time than that, the adviser, John Paul Vann, said in an interview.

"They have enough in the pipeline that Communist forces here will continue to get supplies for some time to come," he said.

North Vietnamese tanks are getting the enormous quantities of fuel they consume mainly from truck convoys coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Mr. Vann added, but strikes have destroyed 40 or 50 of the vehicles since the offensive began.

"But there are limits to what can be done with air power," he said. "Planes can't spot everything, and the weather here is deteriorating."

Action Considered Belated

Many American officers and soldiers feel that President Nixon's new moves have come too late.

"It might have been fine 10 years ago," an Army captain said. "Now it's too late for anything to make much difference. If there had ever been a national will to win in South Vietnam, Saigon would have won years ago. Without that will to win, nothing now will make any difference."

Matters of high policy seem to have little to do with the hour-to-hour events, which have seen the collapse of one South Vietnamese position after another.

Today North Vietnamese infantry supported by tanks completed their 10-day siege of the key base at Poleikleng, smashing their way into the compound and forcing the defenders to withdraw. Poleikleng was one of the main positions defending the western approach to the city of Kontum.

The base was occupied by about 400 rangers recruited from local Montagnard tribes, as well as by several hundred of their wives and children. By late yesterday, about half of the people were reported to have arrived at the village of Poleikrong, across the river.

Troops Are Left Behind

A Vietnamese spokesman said that all those who fled were Rangers and that their wives and children had been left behind, along with two companies of troops. There has been no radio contact with those left.

According to one report, the defenses collapsed after an anti-tank weapon missed an approaching tank. Apparently the defending infantry fled rather than attempt to use rockets that are effective against tanks.

Tanks have also been used in the seesaw battle raging at Benhet, northwest of Kontum, where another ranger battalion is considered to have only a 50-50 chance of survival.

At one time this morning Communist troops and tanks occupied about a third of the compound, which sprawls across three hills. Inside the perimeter, the Vietnamese spokesman said the bodies of about 100 North Vietnamese soldiers and 11 enemy tanks

were destroyed. But the base is still under pressure.

Mr. Vann and Lieut. Gen. Ngo Dzu, commander of the military region, have been flying over embattled positions every day and landing whenever possible to direct operations and to bolster morale. The population of the Central Highlands is leaving, regardless.

Trying to Raise Morale

"Twenty thousand have left Kontum," Mr. Vann said, "15,000 of them on U.S. Army helicopters."

Kontum's original population was 27,000, but it still has 20,000, because of refugees from the northern areas overrun by the Communists.

"The war has bypassed those people and we're not bombing their villages, but even so they are choosing to come south to our side," Mr. Vann said.

Roughly 60 per cent of Pleiku's population of 55,000 have left, he said, mostly on buses or military trucks.

"The poorest people aren't going, partly because they lack the resources and partly because they have nothing to lose anyway," he added.

A Seattle Man's Proposal Proves Agreeable Dessert

SEATTLE (AP) — When Miss Lucy Gonzales, who came here recently from Pueblo, Colo., was dining with a boy friend, Daniel Fiat, each of the fortune cookies she opened bore the message: "Will You Marry Me?"

Mr. Fiat had gone to a great deal of trouble to make his proposal of marriage. He got a fortune cookie-maker to put the special message in 25 of his products. He then had the waiter bring the "loaded" cookies to his table.

Miss Gonzales said "Yes."

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