

Enemy Pullbacks Reported Near Saigon and the DMZ

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, Nov. 15—American and South Vietnamese military sources reported yesterday that several North Vietnamese battalion-sized units had begun pulling back from the area near the demilitarized zone and from the province around Saigon.

The pullbacks, which began last week, are still too small to indicate a trend, these sources stressed. A North Vietnamese battalion can range in size from fewer than 100 to more than 600 men.

It is unclear, the officers said, whether the withdrawals are in preparation for a cease-fire or are simply a rotation of troops after a period of heavy fighting.

Decrease in Attacks

But there has been a definite decrease in Communist attacks, and according to one United States intelligence officer, the North Vietnamese have largely avoided contact with Government troops for the last week except for mortar and artillery barrages.

There were, for example, only 71 Communist-initiated incidents reported yesterday, according to the South Vietnamese command. This contrasts with an average of well over 100 a day at the end of October and the first week of November.

At that time, allied officers

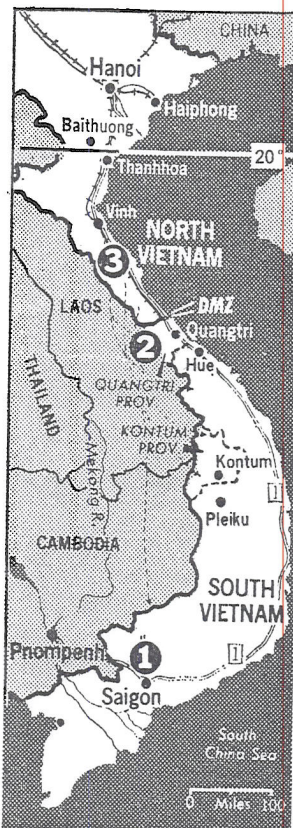
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SOME HANOI UNITS SAID TO PULL BACK

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believe, the North Vietnamese received orders to move into advanced areas and seize as much territory as possible before the cease-fire, which they then expected to begin on Oct. 31.

But, some intelligence officers theorize, when the cease-fire was delayed by President Nguyen Van Thieu's opposition, the North Vietnamese may have received new orders to



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Some Communist units are said to be leaving areas near Saigon (1) and the DMZ (2). U.S. continued heavy bombing of North Vietnam's panhandle (3).

pull back to avoid exposing themselves needlessly.

Some other officers believe that the North Vietnamese may be making token or symbolic withdrawals to try to persuade President Thieu to accept the peace settlement worked out by Hanoi and Washington. Mr. Thieu has repeatedly rejected the accord, largely because it does not provide for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam.

Several South Vietnamese officials, including Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam, have indicated that Hanoi has in fact secretly offered to withdraw a few army units.

However, Hanoi has continued to send supplies "in relatively modest amounts" down through the North Vietnamese panhandle and across the demilitarized zone into Quang Tri Province, a senior United States Air Force officer said. These supplies involved about 30 artillery pieces and 25 tanks, the officer reported.

Heavy Raid on Panhandle

In the air war, the United States command said that Air Force and Navy fighter-bombers made 220 strikes against these supplies Monday in one of the heaviest raids since President Nixon limited the bombing of North Vietnam to below the 20th Parallel.

In addition, B-52 heavy bombers flew 11 missions of three planes apiece against supply targets in North Vietnam's panhandle, the command said. According to one Air Force officer, these intensive B-52 raids have been very successful over the last few days, and Monday night, for example, one raid set off 60 secondary explosions in an ammunition dump.

B-52's also carried out 29 missions in South Vietnam, five of them within 35 miles of Saigon. United States fighter-bombers made 288 strikes in South Vietnam, the command announced.

Only light and scattered ground fighting was reported yesterday, with most of the incidents limited to small-scale shelling attacks. In one incident, the Saigon command said, Communist gunners fired three rounds into the Thuduc officers' school six miles north of Saigon, wounding six cadets.