

Thrusts by Saigon Troops To Gain Ground Reported

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Saturday, Jan. 20—South Vietnamese troops have begun a series of offensive thrusts on several fronts, apparently in an attempt to improve their positions before a cease-fire goes into effect, it was reported yesterday.

Fierce battles, initiated by the South Vietnamese and backed by heavy United States support, were reported raging in the Que Son Valley, in the area just south of the demilitarized zone, and in the area Northwest of Saigon.

The offensive was reportedly ordered by President Nguyen Van Thieu, who met with the commanders of the country's four military regions three days ago and told them, according to South Vietnamese sources, that they had to take the initiative before a cease-fire was declared.

The expectation here has been that the Communists would start an offensive similar to the one they staged last October in anticipation of a cease-fire. Thus far, no such Communist action has materialized.

Pressure on Hiep Duc

American military sources in Da Nang said that the heaviest fighting of the current South Vietnamese drive was going on southwest of Que Son, where government troops were said to be pouring tens of thousands of rounds of artillery fire on Com-

munist positions in and around the district capital of Hiep Duc. According to these sources, South Vietnamese troops yesterday captured Fire Base West, which is perched on a hill overlooking Hiep Duc from the east.

The Americans said that the South Vietnamese 3rd Division, which lost Quang Tri city to the North Vietnamese last spring, was "on the point" of recapturing Hiep Duc, seized by the Communists in April.

In support of the thrust toward Hiep Duc, United States airmen flew three B-52 missions against Communist positions north of the town.

Support by B-52's

B-52 strikes were also flown in support of South Vietnamese marine units pushing toward the bank of the Cua Viet River, north of Quang Tri city, just south of the demilitarized zone.

American military officials reported six B-52 missions flown in the Quang Tri area.

South Vietnamese marines have been fighting against entrenched North Vietnamese units in that area for months without gaining any ground. But an American official in Da Nang said that the marines were "moving out quite smartly in the current push."

The South Vietnamese reported that Thursday night and early yesterday, marine units in the area had been hit by 770 mortar and artillery shells. They said eight marines had been killed and 16 wounded while killing 61 enemy soldiers.

Heavy fighting was reported in Binh Duong province about 30 miles northwest of Saigon, where four B-52 missions were flown in support of South Vietnamese ground forces.

South Vietnamese military spokesman said that two of their infantry positions near Tri Tam in Binh Duong Province had been shelled Thursday: They said that one position, about five miles east of Tri Tam, had been attacked, that seven South Vietnamese soldiers were killed and 14 wounded, and that enemy losses were unknown.

U.S. Lists Air Strikes

SAIGON, Saturday, Jan. 20 (AP)—In the 24 hours ended at 8 A.M. yesterday, the American bombing campaign in South Vietnam reportedly involved a total of 386 planes.

The United States command listed 302 strikes by fighter-bombers and 28 missions, each presumably involving three planes, by B-52 heavy bombers.

The South Vietnamese command reported that its jet and propeller-driven fighter-bombers had flown 157 sorties in the 24 hours ended at 6 A.M.

Cambodians Report Gain

PHENOM PENH, Cambodia, Jan. 19 (Reuters)—The Cambodian command reported today that government paratroops yesterday fought their way into the village of Svey Prey, 37 miles south of here. The outpost had been under serious threat for 12 days.

Last night, the command said, communist forces staged another ground assault on the village, but were beaten off.

Luang Prabang Raid

VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 19 (Reuters)—The airport at the royal capital of Luang Prabang north of Vientiane was struck last night by 30 Soviet-made rockets and a light observation plane was damaged, an army spokesman said today.



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Heavy fighting initiated by Saigon troops was reported near Que Son (1), Quang Tri (2) and northwest of Saigon (3).