

# Bid to Regain Land

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DANANG, Jan. 19—South Vietnamese forces in the five northern provinces of the country have been ordered to make one final try to retake territory they lost to the Communists in last spring's offensive, U.S. sources said today.

Government units, including divisions that were badly mauled during the North Vietnamese offensive last year are moving against Communist-held areas throughout the region.

Despite the ambitious scope of these military operations, the level of fighting is expected to be limited on both sides by the weariness of the troops and widespread knowledge that the war's end is near.

Intelligence reports indicate no large-scale effort by the Communists to make major last-minute gains, before a cease-fire is declared, sources said.

However, American officials do expect a rash of small Communist attacks in "fringe" areas of the five provinces, in the day or two before the cease-fire is signed, so the Vietcong flag can be raised over as many populated areas as possible when the shooting stops.

The government has mounted one other significant new operation, a two-division push into Communist strongholds north-

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west of Saigon, but the greatest effort appears to be here in Military Region 1 where so many of the bloodiest battles of the war have been fought.

At least one new government drive has been launched in the last few days and ongoing operations have been stepped up with increased U.S. air support and heavy artillery bombardments, breaking the relative lull of recent weeks.

On the critical Quangtri front, South Vietnamese troops have reached within two miles of the Cuaviet River, south of the Demilitarized Zone, but sources doubted that Saigon's troops would be able to move farther. In that operation, as in the area northwest of Saigon, the United States has been sending heavy concentrations of B52s to support the South Vietnamese forces.

Over the past month, sources said, the North Vietnamese have been infiltrating through the DMZ area at about 60 per cent the rate of a year ago when Hanoi was preparing for the biggest offensive of the war.

In all, there are elements of six North Vietnamese divisions in Quangtri Province, facing South Vietnamese marines and airborne troops. The

\* See  
AIR GROUND WAR  
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cease-fire agreement is expected to re-establish the DMZ as a neutral zone limiting military resupply to North Vietnamese troops stationed south of it.

Saigon's main reason for trying to reach the demarcation line 10 miles north of the Cuaviet, however, is its considerable symbolic value. The 17th parallel represents the northern boundary of the ter-

ritory over which President Thieu has been claiming sovereignty, a key issue in the Paris talks. \*

The latest government counteroffensive is in Quanggai Province, long center of Communist strength. The South Vietnamese 2d division today fanned out over an area around ruined Bato, a district town in the mountainous southwestern portion of the province.

Government forces have also been pressing forward against intermittently heavy

resistance in the Queson Valley of Quangtin Province, from which they were routed in their last big setback of North Vietnam's 1972 campaign. U.S. sources said the South Vietnamese are trying to reach Hiepduc, a district town which is the opening to the Communist base areas in the mountains.

The government unit in that operation is the reconstructed 3d Division, which was shattered in the loss of Quangtri early last May.

Other important govern-

ment operations are underway in the mountains west of Hue where several firebases have been retaken in the last few weeks, and around Hoi-an south of Danang.

Intelligence sources see no repetition of the Communist plan to seize Danang and other large population centers when a cease-fire appeared imminent in October. The thrust of orders reaching both military units and political cadres, the sources said, is for consolidation of areas already under Communist control.