

JAN 22 1973

# Prisoner Release Offered by Vietcong

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, Jan 21—The Vietcong offered Sunday to release 130 wounded South Vietnamese prisoners captured two days before.

Saigon officials did not reply to the offer immediately, but senior military commanders were reported holding an emergency conference on the subject.

Field reports from the Mekong Delta, told of a severe setback for South Vietnamese troops in another action when a 150-man helicopter assault force landed in an enemy trap Saturday. Twenty members of the force were killed, 15 were wounded and 103 are unaccounted for, the reports said.

A broadcast by the Vietcong's radio said the 130 wounded prisoners they offered to release were captured Friday during heavy fighting near the big Michelin rubber plantation 40 miles northwest of Saigon.

It gave a map location and specific instructions for the South Vietnamese to fly unarmed helicopters to the area one at a time to pick up the prisoners.

The site given was six miles east of the plantation headquarters at Dautieng, also known as Tritam district. It was the scene of a battle Friday that South Vietnamese spokesmen called the biggest in the Saigon region since the North Vietnamese attack on Anloc last year.

The Saigon military command said Sunday that 325 enemy were killed in the day-

long fighting. It listed South Vietnamese losses as 46 killed and 106 wounded.

The Vietcong radio claimed its forces "wiped out" two battalions of the 5th South Vietnamese division, and said they killed or captured 850 South Vietnamese including many officers.

Radio Hanoi, echoing the Vietcong claims, said there was "happy news" of victory. It escalated the Vietcong's claim of casualties inflicted to three battalions "destroyed or badly mauled," with more than 400 men captured.

In the air war, allied planes attacked a 100-truck Communist supply convoy Sunday as it headed toward two North Vietnamese regiments fighting in heavy jungles northwest of Saigon, military sources said.

American aircraft continued flying large numbers of attacks throughout South Vietnam. There were 331 fighter-bomber sorties and 30 three-plane waves of B-52 heavy bombers throughout the country during the 24 hours ending at 8 a.m. Sunday, the U.S. command said.

There were no reports of fighting in the Quangtri area Sunday.