

FIGHTING GOES ON

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Saigon Reports Slight Decline in Level of Military Activity

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, Feb. 1—Fighting continued to sputter and flare in South Vietnam yesterday as the cease-fire neared the end of its fourth full day.

A South Vietnamese military spokesman said there was a slight decrease in the level of military activity during the last 24 hours, but he dismissed the reduction as "not significant."

Earlier, American analysts had said that they expected the level of fighting to subside to something approaching a real cease-fire by last night.

The South Vietnamese do not report any violation of the cease-fire by their own troops, and there were no available reports from the Communists yesterday. In the past the Vietcong command has said that its troops were "scrupulously" adhering to the terms of the cease-fire and that the Saigon Government's forces were repeatedly violating them.

Verification Not Available

Because the international supervisory machinery established by the Paris peace agreement has not yet begun to function, there has been no independent verification of either side's allegations. [Page 17.]

However, American analysts continue to maintain privately that the fighting is diminishing and that an acceptable cease-fire will be achieved soon. By an acceptable cease-fire, they mean a situation in which, even if both sides charge violations, neither was engaged in any significant military action.

As a complete cease-fire continued to elude South Vietnam, Vice President Agnew spent a busy day in Saigon meeting with South Vietnamese and American officials.

Secrecy Continues

Mr. Agnew met for an hour with President Nguyen Van Thieu at the presidential palace yesterday afternoon, then attended a reception and dinner at the United States Embassy.

Maintaining the atmosphere of secrecy that has cloaked recent events in South Vietnam, no statement was issued by the Vice President and he was not available to reporters.

Mr. Agnew said on his arrival here Tuesday that he had come to "discuss postwar relations with President Thieu and other

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Sporadic Clashes Continuing in Vietnam

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members of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam."

He was expected to leave Saigon today.

Meanwhile, American military personnel were leaving South Vietnam in ever-increasing numbers. Under the terms of the peace agreement, the United States must withdraw its military force from Vietnam within 60 days after the cease-fire began on Sunday.

800 Leave in Two Days

The American command said yesterday that a total of 300 soldiers, 300 marines and 200 members of the Air Force had left on Tuesday and yesterday. A command official said the flow was running at 300 to 400 men a day.

The number of American troops remaining in South Vietnam now stands at just 22,000.

In the latest report issued by the South Vietnamese military authorities, covering the period of 6 A.M. to noon yesterday, 45 Communist violations of the cease-fire were charged, bringing the total number they have reported since the cease-fire went into effect to 991.

According to the South Vietnamese, a total of 2,434 Communist soldiers have been killed and 113 captured since the cease-fire went into effect at 8 P.M. Sunday (7 P.M. Saturday, New York time).

The Saigon authorities said that during the same period 434 Government soldiers were killed, 1,633 were wounded and 129 were missing.

In addition, according to the South Vietnamese, 15 civilians were killed, 90 were wounded and 2 were "abducted" since the cease-fire began.

The Government spokesman said that as of 6 A.M. yesterday the Communists had penetrated 142 hamlets around the country since the cease-fire started and had been driven out of 89 of

them. That left 53 such hamlets still contested by Communist and Government troops. On Tuesday the number of contested hamlets had stood at 49.

Much but not all of the continuing fighting involves these battles for hamlets. One serious hamlet engagement announced by the South Vietnamese yesterday occurred Tuesday afternoon, when according to a Government spokesman, Communist troops attacked Thach Tru near the district capital of Mo Duc, which is in Quang Ngai province in the central coastal region.

The South Vietnamese said their infantry and ranger units repulsed the attack during a three-hour battle, killed 35 attacking soldiers and suffered no casualties among their own men.

In another such engagement, the Government said Communist troops "penetrated" the hamlet of Bau Dai in Long An province just southwest of Saigon Tuesday morning. The Government said its militia drove out the Communists in midafternoon, killing five and suffering no casualties of their own.

The rest of the fighting has reportedly involved attempts by the Communists to cut roads and by Government troops to force their reopening, as well as clashes between troops attacking each other's positions.

Richardson Is Optimistic

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 31 — Secretary of Defense Elliot L.

Richardson said today that he was "cautiously optimistic" about a substantial reduction in the fighting in South Vietnam to "a pretty stable situation within another week or 10 days."

Mr. Richardson said that contending forces appeared to be attempting to gain back territory seized by the other just before the cease-fire last week-end.

There has been a reduction in hostilities day by day," he said. He suggested that the International Commission for Control and Supervision and the Four-Party Joint Military Commission both appeared to be making slow but discernible progress in preparing for an active role in monitoring the cease-fire.

The Defense Secretary took office yesterday.