

# 'Marked Decrease' Noted In South Vietnam Fighting

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By SYLVAN FOX

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Friday, Feb. 2—With the Vietnam cease-fire in its sixth day, American analysts today reported "a marked decrease" in fighting and said that the situation was approaching "a fairly manageable level."

Their appraisal appeared to be supported by battlefield statistics released yesterday afternoon by the South Vietnamese military authorities.

These figures show a slow but steady decline in the level of military activity around the country as measured by three of Saigon's own indicators: the number of reports of Communist violations of the cease-fire, the number of reported casual-

ties on both sides and the number of South Vietnamese hamlets from which Government troops are trying to dislodge the Communists.

The United States analysts, who have access to more detailed information than the South Vietnamese make public, say that the decline is even more evident than the Saigon Government's statistics suggest.

"The gross figures of incidents aren't really too revealing," said a high-ranking American official. "You have to make a clear distinction between real hostilities and local outbreaks. The weight of the

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# 'Marked Decrease' in Fighting In Vietnam Seen by U.S. Aides

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incidents shows a marked decrease in fighting."

As an example of recent real fighting, he cited a battle that occurred in northern Quang Tri Province near the demilitarized zone Wednesday night and yesterday morning.

In that battle, according to the South Vietnamese, Government marines were forced to abandon the Cua Viet base, which they had captured in the final hours before the cease-fire went into effect, under tremendous shelling from Communist batteries.

A South Vietnamese military spokesman said that several thousand rounds of artillery, mortar and rocket fire had struck the base, inflicting more than 100 casualties, both dead and wounded, on the South Vietnamese marines.

By contrast, the American official said that most of the action reported by the South Vietnamese as "Communist violations of the cease-fire" consisted of "a couple of guys messing around in a hamlet."

"The combat situation here is like a storm at sea," the official said. "After the storm ends, the sea keeps on heaving. That's what going on now

—heaving, but it's steadily declining."

The official quickly added that "this place is never going to be Switzerland, even in the best of times."

The South Vietnamese, meanwhile, accused the Communists of 54 violations of the cease-fire between 6 A.M. and noon yesterday, bringing to 1,188 the total of such charges since the cease-fire took effect.

There were no counter-claims from the Communists, who have said in the past that they were "scrupulously" observing the cease-fire and that it was being violated repeatedly by Saigon.

## Steady Decline Is Evident

On a daily basis, the Government's figures show a steady decline in the number of reports of Communist cease-fire violations since last Sunday morning, when the cease-fire began.

For the first day of the cease-fire, the Government reported 426 Communist violations. For the second, the figure was 311; for the third, it was 209 and for the fourth it was 188. No full-day totals are yet available beyond the fourth day.

A similar pattern appears in the Government's casualty figures. For the first two days, the reported figures were 1,761 Communist soldiers killed and 92 captured, and 296 Government soldiers killed and 1,017 wounded.

For the third day, the casualty reports looked like this: 673 Communist soldiers killed, 21 captured, 38 Government soldiers killed, 616 wounded.

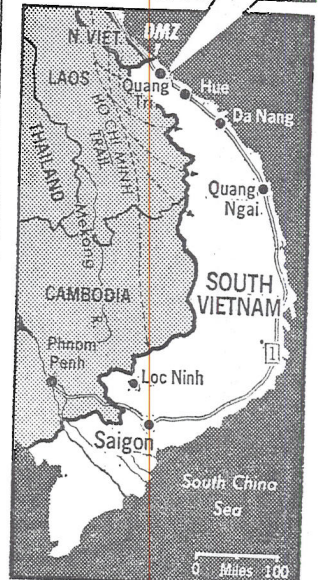
For the fourth day, the reported figures were 343 Communist soldiers killed, 4 captured, 57 Government soldiers killed—a slight increase—and 364 wounded.

## The 'Penetrated' Hamlets

A similar pattern emerges from the Government's figures on contested hamlets, which Saigon says Communist troops "penetrated" after the cease-fire.

After the first day, the Government said that 122 hamlets had been "penetrated." After the second day, the Government said that 49 were still being contested. After the third day, Saigon military authorities said that 53 hamlets were partly occupied by Communist troops, and after the fourth day they said that the number was down to 36.

Much of the continuing fighting has centered on attempts by the Government to dislodge Communist forces from these hamlets, whether they were penetrated just before or after the cease-fire.



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Government marines were forced to abandon base on Cua Viet (cross).

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