

# FAILURE TO HALT VIETNAM FIGHTING PUZZLES EXPERTS

No Cease-Fire Order Given  
by Saigon or Vietcong  
3 Weeks After Pact

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FLARE-UPS ARE STUDIED

U.S. Analysts Still Believe  
Peace Will Come When  
Opponents Are Spent

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 16—American officials and Western diplomats have privately expressed surprise and some concern during the last few days about the continued fighting in South Vietnam three weeks after the official cease-fire.

These analysts and observers had drawn up a scenario of sorts early in the cease-fire in which the fighting would decline steadily so that by now there would be little more than isolated exchanges of small-arms fire and occasional clashes of minor consequence.

For the first ten days or two weeks, that expectation appeared accurate. There had been a fairly steady drop in fighting to the point at which there was little combat beyond minor skirmishing and isolated flare-ups.

## No Orders for a Halt

But since then, there have been spasmodic surges in battlefield activity that have puzzled some of the analysts.

"I expected after a week or ten days we would be down to sniping and small-arms fire," said an American military analyst, with some exasperation. "I didn't really expect the artillery expenditure that we're seeing."

This analyst was equally surprised and concerned by the failure, up to now, of either the Saigon authorities or the Vietcong to issue orders to their troops to cease firing.

"Neither side has given the command to stop fighting," he said. "I expected to see such orders issued by now. I'm surprised that it hasn't happened already."

The analyst and others interviewed during the last few days do not yet believe that the continued and even somewhat increased fighting indicates that a real truce is unlikely to be attained in South Vietnam.

## Shrug at Violation Charges

They still maintain, as they have from the beginning, that eventually the fighting will more or less end completely because the two sides have grown weary, have begun to exhaust their supplies or have begun to feel the pressures of the upcoming Paris peace conference and of the apparently developing conjunction of interest of Washington and Hanoi in quelling the combat.

As before, the American analysts still dismiss most of the thousands of cease-fire violations alleged by the Saigon Government as what one analyst called "niggling." They con-

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tinue to attribute the high casualties on both sides—running to more than 2,000 killed each week, according to Saigon figures—as not so much the product of heavy fighting as of what an American official called "the cumulative effect of widespread if small actions."

Nevertheless, it is evident that, with the experts' scenario faltering, there is some concern about when, if ever, an actual cease-fire will take effect here. The Americans who talked during the first week or so about an end to the fighting as being "days away," now suggest that a real truce is likely to come "in weeks." At that, they are less confident about their prognosis than they were two weeks ago.

What seems to be going wrong? First of all, analysts agree, there is the failure of both sides to order their men to stop fighting. On the contrary, according to intelligence sources, the Communists are still being ordered to "grab land and grab people," as one official put it, and the Government troops are still being told to strike back at any Communist moves.

## 'The Enemy' Is Cited

"The enemy is determined to try anything in the book to get as much land and people as possible," said an American, continuing to employ the word "enemy" for the Communists when the word has more or less gone out of style with the Americans here. "And the GVN," he added, referring to the Saigon Government, "is not to let them do it."

Secondly, according to these analysts and other Western officials, the absence of any clear-cut determination of what

side controls what territory contributes to the flare-ups.

"The fuzziness of control is what is causing a lot of the ongoing fighting," was the explanation offered by an American official.

## Three Trouble Spots

United States analysts list three areas of the country where significant clashes continue to occur fairly regularly.

One is the area around the Cua Viet base, just south of the demilitarized zone. This base was captured after a long and costly struggle by Government marines, reportedly only minutes before the cease-fire went into effect on Jan. 28. It was recaptured by the Communists a day or two later and they have held it since.

The Government contends that the Communist recapture of the base after the cease-fire took effect was a violation of the Paris accord, and it has ordered its troops to Cua Viet. The result has been almost incessant artillery and ground combat in that area of South Vietnam.

A second point of contention is further south at Sa Huynh, a small port town in southern Quang Ngai Province that was seized by the Communists the night before the cease-fire.

The Communists want desperately to hold the town because it gives them port facilities on the South China Sea that let them supply nearby base areas by sea, rather than depending solely on inland trails. According to American analysts, Communist forces in Sa Huynh have been ordered to hold the town at all costs and Government forces have been ordered to "eradicate them" at all costs.

Then there is the area be-

tween Kontum and Pleiku in the Central Highlands. There, the American officials say, the fighting is "causing some trouble" and appears to be focused on attempts by Government forces to open Highway 14, the supply route linking the two provincial capitals.

Canadian members of the International Commission for Control and Supervision have insisted publicly that the solution is for the Four-Party Joint Military Commission, consisting of the United States, North Vietnam, the Saigon Government and the Vietcong, to agree on lines of demarcation separating Communist-controlled and Saigon-controlled areas.

Privately, the Canadians have begun to concede that that may be "unrealistic." Both they and the American analysts agree on the truism that the fighting can only stop completely when both sides decide it should stop and that in the meantime there is little that any outside peace-keeping agency can do to stop it.

The Americans say that in their view, the prospect of demarcation lines is remote at present. "They're a long way from even knowing how they're going to do it," an American official said.

## Which Comes First?

While the Canadians argue that there can be no real cease-fire until such demarcation lines are established, the American analysts say there can be no demarcation lines until there is a cease-fire.

These analysts believe that the closer the opposing forces come to the positions they held before the cease-fire, the easier it will be for them to disengage and stop fighting.

**DO NOT FORGET THE NEEDS!**