

Fighting in South Vietnam Reported at 3-Month Low

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By SYLVAN FOX APR 24 1973

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Tuesday, April 24—Fighting in South Vietnam during the last few days has declined to its lowest level since the Jan. 28 cease-fire took effect, Saigon and American officials reported yesterday.

Saigon military authorities reported only 66 battlefield incidents around the country during the 24-hour period ended at 6 A.M. yesterday. It was the lowest number of such incidents—the Government calls them Communist cease-fire violations—since the cease-fire.

The previous low was reached April 16 when the Government reported 85 incidents. Most of the time since the pact, the number of such incidents has run to about 130 a day.

Despite the decline in fighting, neither South Vietnamese nor American sources were drawing any conclusive inferences about a change in the overall military picture here.

Some Increase Expected

"It would be premature to interpret the low level of Communist violations in the past few days as an indication that the enemy is now settling for peace, or an indication of their goodwill for peace," said one South Vietnamese military source.

He added that the Communists, as the result of continuing infiltration of men and equipment into South Vietnam, had the capacity for "launching a large-scale offensive." He suggested that South Vietnam expected some kind of surge in combat in the next few months. "The recent relatively low level of daily violations is not an indication to the contrary," he said.

United States sources said

the low level of battlefield activity reported by the South Vietnamese was "also reflected in U.S. reports."

"We are conscious of a diminishing level of activity," a high American official said.

Can't See a Trend'

But, like the South Vietnamese, he was uncertain about what, if anything, the decline meant.

"I can't see a trend on the basis of a few days," he said. "If it continues this way for a couple of weeks, it might mean something."

Though fighting around South Vietnam was generally down, there was still some combat around the northern city of Hue and on the banks of the Mekong River near the Cambodian border, and there were many isolated incidents.

Communist forces have been shelling Government positions south and west of Hue for about two weeks. Yesterday, the Government reported continued shelling there and an attack on a Government position only six miles west of the former imperial capital.

The government said the attack was repulsed, and discounted the idea that the city itself was in any peril.