

Fewer Battles in South Vietnam

Saigon

Scattered fighting continued throughout South Vietnam yesterday as the latest cease-fire went into effect. But reports from the field indicated that the battles were fewer and on a far smaller scale than those that accompanied the original cease-fire last January.

The Saigon command claimed today that the Communist side had committed 84 violations in the first 18 hours of the new cease-fire. Field reports indicated that the Saigon forces had replied with sporadic artillery fire and air attacks.

The contrast with the enormous spurt in fighting when the Paris agreement was signed last January — when there were almost 400 reported Communist violations in the first day — led one senior American official here to say optimistically that “this time there really will be a cease-fire.”

DELAY

However, there were other indications that the provisions of the new Paris joint communique, signed Wednesday, might not be carried out on schedule.

The government spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Le Trung Hien, for example, announced that South Vietnamese field commanders, would not meet with their Communist counterparts at noon yesterday as specified in the communique.

Although the communique declared that the opposing commanders must meet within 24 hours after the cease-fire begins, Hien said government officers would not do so unless the Joint Military Commission had reached a unanimous decision on the subject.

The Saigon government has long opposed any contact between its officers and the Viet Cong, apparently out of fear that it might lead to fraternization and possibly imply recognition of the Communist's legitimacy.

It also was disclosed that the South Vietnamese have requested a 15-day postponement in their political talks with the Viet Cong's Provi-

sional Revolutionary Government at Paris. A foreign ministry spokesman said that the delay in the talks, which are supposed to lead to the creation of a national council of reconciliation within 45 days, had been caused by “technical reasons.”

OPPOSITION

The spokesman declined to elaborate, but it appeared that any delay at all made the establishment of the national council even more unlikely within the 45 days specified by the communique. Saigon has opposed the formation of the national council, a kind of coalition government, without first setting a date for national elections the South Vietnamese feel confident they would win.

The South Vietnamese people greeted the new cease-fire with even less apparent interest than they did the first one six months ago. No church bells were rung, in contrast to January, and there was no moment of silence to honor the dead.

The Communists' radio broadcast an order throughout the day yesterday to its soldiers to stop fighting, and the government announced that its field commanders had been instructed to obey the new truce. However, field reports indicated that many local South Vietnamese troops had not yet received such orders by noontime when the cease-fire was to begin.

The Saigon command asserted that these had been a slight upsurge in Communist attacks during the day preceding the truce, with 126 violations reported, 19 more than the previous day.

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