

# Red Force Overruns A South Viet Base

## Saigon

Up to 5000 North Vietnamese troops supported by tanks overran a South Vietnamese base yesterday, inflicting heavy losses and pushing the remnants of the fleeing forces into a tight pocket, the Saigon command said.

It said half of the 639-man ranger battalion defending the isolated Dak Pek border camp 300 miles north of Saigon and 12 miles from the Laotian border were either killed, wounded or missing after all-night assaults by the Communists.

The fate of the rest of the ranger battalion, more than 200 other Saigon government militiamen stationed at the district's military headquar-

ters a few hundred yards away, and more than 3000 civilians living in Dak Pek town was not known.

Lieutenant Colonel Le Trung Hien, chief spokesman for the Saigon command, said the North Vietnamese forces smashed their way into the eastern half of the Dak Pek border camp, forcing what was left of the ranger battalion to retreat to the western half of the defensive perimeter, which includes the military headquarters for the district.

Many of the defenders and 90 per cent of the civilians in the town are Montagnards, Hien said.

He said he had no indication whether the town's pop-

ulation had been evacuated. This would be difficult because Highway 14 leading southward to Kontum, 55 miles away, has been cut for two years.

Hien said Dak Pek base fell after a battering by 700 mortar shells and an all-night assault. Those who retreated into a tight pocket are surrounded, Hien said, with no prospect for air support during the afternoon because of worsening weather.

Spokesmen for the Saigon command said the attack was part of a North Vietnamese plan to knock off all South Vietnamese bases in zones that are generally controlled by the Communist side.

*Associated Press*