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Defender Expects Fresh Attack

Says Reds Lost 2,000 at Loc Ninh



MAJ. GEN. JOHN HAY
Reds Are "Hanging In"

VC Offer To Free 3 NCOs

SAIGON (AP) — The U.S. Mission called on the Viet Cong Saturday to disclose when and where they will turn loose three captive American sergeants that a Communist broadcast said would be freed.

The hitch was that the broadcast said the guerrillas' National Liberation Front was ready to hand over the three to their families or "to progressive American people's organizations who come to receive them."

From garbled Communist transmissions, U.S. authorities

SAIGON (UPI) — The commander of U.S. forces defending Loc Ninh estimated Saturday the Communists have lost at least 2,000 men trying to take the battered district town.

But he said two fresh North Vietnamese regiments have moved in as reinforcements and another attack appeared imminent.

Maj. Gen. John Hay's 1st Inf. Div. patrolling the eastern defenses of the town about 70 miles north of Saigon ran into heavy machine-gun and rifle fire Saturday. They suffered one killed and five wounded and pulled back to let air and artillery pound the position.

Hay said the Viet Cong 272nd and 273rd Regs. "have had the hell chewed out of them" in the

seven days of fighting around the town the Communists had hoped to seize and hold as a propaganda victory during the inauguration of South Vietnam's new government.

But Hay said it was "conservative" to estimate a death toll of twice the 2,000 he had estimated.

"You can figure they've taken at least that many away," Hay said. "There are some bodies we never find."

"And if you figure that they have the normal ratio of injured to killed, they've lost about 6,000 men to wounds."

Hay said the 141st and 165th North Vietnamese Regs. have now moved into the area and are threatening more trouble.

"They're really hanging in

there. I've never known them to hold like this after an attack," Hay said.

He said the areas to the east of Loc Ninh are laced with trails and "every time we poke in there we get a fight. There's at least a regiment in there right now."

Lead elements of a battalion commanded by Lt. Col. James F. Cochran III ran into some of the Communists Saturday.

"They hit us with what apparently was an early warning screen," Cochran said. Two machine guns opened up from each side and rifle fire from a horse-shoe in front of them. His men were pinned down for several minutes before artillery zeroed in on the Communist positions, he said.

Big North Vietnamese Force Strikes Troops in Highlands

SAIGON (AP)—Ground fighting in the Vietnam war shifted Saturday from the Loc Ninh district to the Central Highlands where U.S. infantrymen were reported up against a multi-battalion force of North Vietnamese regulars.

Three separate mortar and small arms attacks were reported on units of the U.S. 4th Inf. Div., two of them near Dak To about 310 miles north of Saigon, and the third about 101 miles to the south of Dak To.

Field reports said the North Vietnamese troops were deeply entrenched on a ridge line in the mountainous jungles and

that American tactical fighter-bombers and artillery pounded their positions all day Saturday.

It was the heaviest fighting in the Central Highlands in more than three months.

The North Vietnamese began pouring in mortar and small arms fire on the positions of two battalions of the 4th Inf. Div., operating about 10 miles apart on a search operation.

One battalion was in heavy contact for 3½ hours Friday after one of its patrols ran into North Vietnamese forces dug in fortified positions, field reports said.

Early Saturday morning, the Communists opened up again with mortars and small arms, and the contact continued sporadically throughout the day, 4th Div. officers said.

Further to the south, deep in the Mekong Delta, a U.S. task force launched a new search and destroy operation centered in an area 58 miles southwest of Saigon.

The operation was launched Thursday but not announced until Saturday for security reasons.

The U.S. Command said there has been no significant contact thus far.

U.S. May Hike Thai Aid

BANGKOK (UPI) — Thailand and the United States have agreed on a new aid package that will permit this country to increase its forces in Vietnam, Deputy Premier Gen. Prapas Charusathien told the Bangkok Post in an interview Friday.

The increase in troop strength to a 12,000-man division was conditioned on increased U.S. aid, the paper quoted Prapas as saying, and added that the fresh troops will go to Vietnam within 120 days of the time the agreement is signed.

Prapas said "within 120 days of the signing of the agreement, an additional Thai force of 8,000 troops will be able to leave for Vietnam," according to the Post.

The increased U.S. aid to this country will include both equipment for the Vietnam-bound division and strengthening of the armed forces remaining inside Thailand, which has its own growing insurgency problem.

Viet Cong Kill Chiefs in Raid

S&S Vietnam Bureau

SAIGON — A Viet Cong company attacked a compound 13 miles northeast of An Khe Friday, killing seven persons, including two hamlet chiefs and the assistant village chief.

The compound was guarded by a platoon of regional and popular forces soldiers.

The attack began at about 3:20 a.m. and the enemy was driven off after about 20 minutes of