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On Feb. 15, chanting "Down with the US assassin!", 3,000 Quy Nhonese protested against the murder of civilians on February 10, and set fire to a US office and 7 US military vehicles.

NIXON'S MERCENARIES

THE bulk of invading troops in Lower Laos, in the Highway 9 region, are essentially composed of Saigon units. Besides the "paratroopers," there are the First Infantry Division, the "Marine" Division, the Armoured Brigade (the two latter are the only specimens of their kinds in the puppet armed forces) and "Ranger" units.

The US command regards them as crack units of the Saigon army on whom Nixon pins all his hopes to bring to fruition his "Vietnamization" plan.

What is their worth?

Let's deal first with the First Infantry Division.

THE FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION

SET up on Jan. 1, 1955, it is the elder of all the big puppet units. It consists of various elements of the supplementary forces of the former French expeditionary corps stationed in

saved its bacon on Highway 9 (Dong Ha-Khe Sanh) thanks to the hurried fielding of US Third "Marine" Division. Eventually Westmoreland painstakingly tried to put it back on its feet.

When the Tet 1968 sweeping offensives erupted, this division was still "convalescing." From February to August of that year, the patriotic forces put 13 of its battalions out of action. In February alone, the First Regiment had 50% of its men on the casualty list; the Second Regiment lost 2,500 men, while the Third Regiment, badly mauled, had only 580 men left, or 20% of its original strength. *Reuter* reported on March 11, 1968 that at least half of the Saigon troops in the northernmost provinces (operating areas of the First Infantry Division) had been put out of action within one month. Two of its three regiments, one of the most seasoned divisions of the Saigon army, were hacked to pieces in the Hue engagements.

the PLAF attacks. Since 1970, its losses have been still very heavy and the morale of its troops very low. It is one of the units having the highest rates of desertion, disobedience (to marching orders) and even of mutinies.

Here are some typical cases:

— In 1970, the First Infantry Division had one battalion and 4 companies entirely wiped out and 4 battalions decimated. Three of its battalion commanders were killed in the same year. In May 1970, at Co Tien, west of Hue city, its 54th Regiment was written off the musterroll with its CP overrun and a regimental commander and his deputy badly injured.