

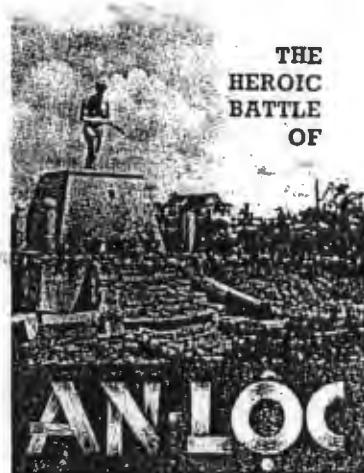
THE
HEROIC
BATTLE
OF

ANHOC

THE HEROIC BATTLE OF AN-LỘC

Front cover :

Statue of soldier in the center of the provincial capital of AN LOC standing miraculously undamaged among ruins and devastations after 67 days and nights of enemy's ferocious artillery barrage.



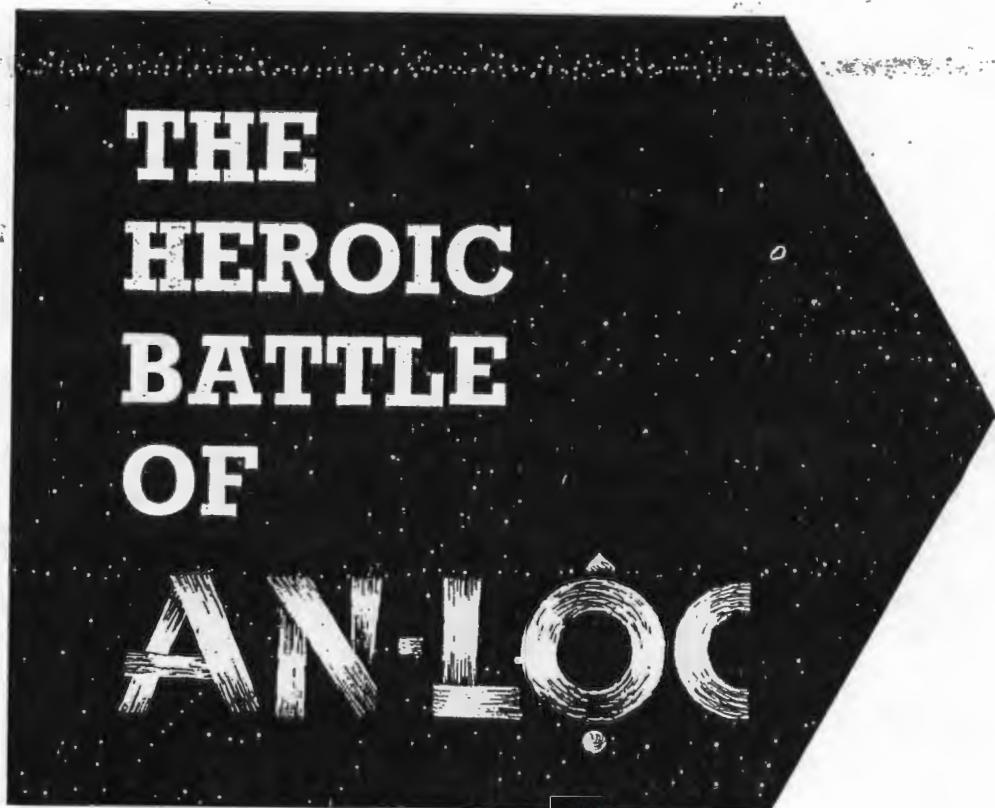
Back cover :

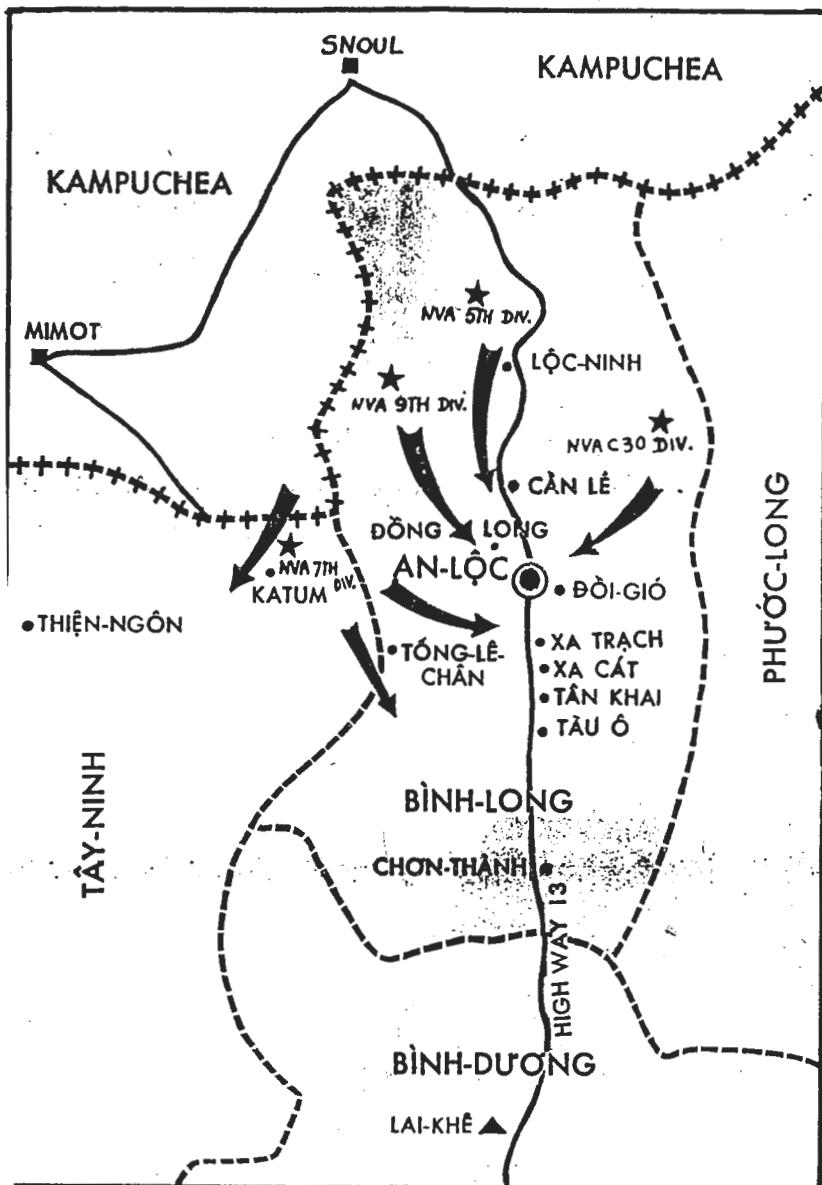
In a counter-offensive fight against the last desperate assault of Communist North Vietnamese invaders, these valiant defenders of AN LOC have just added one more Russian-made tank to their unit's enemy tank eliminating score thus completely shattering the myth of NVA Commander-in-chief VO NGUYEN GIAP's invincibility.



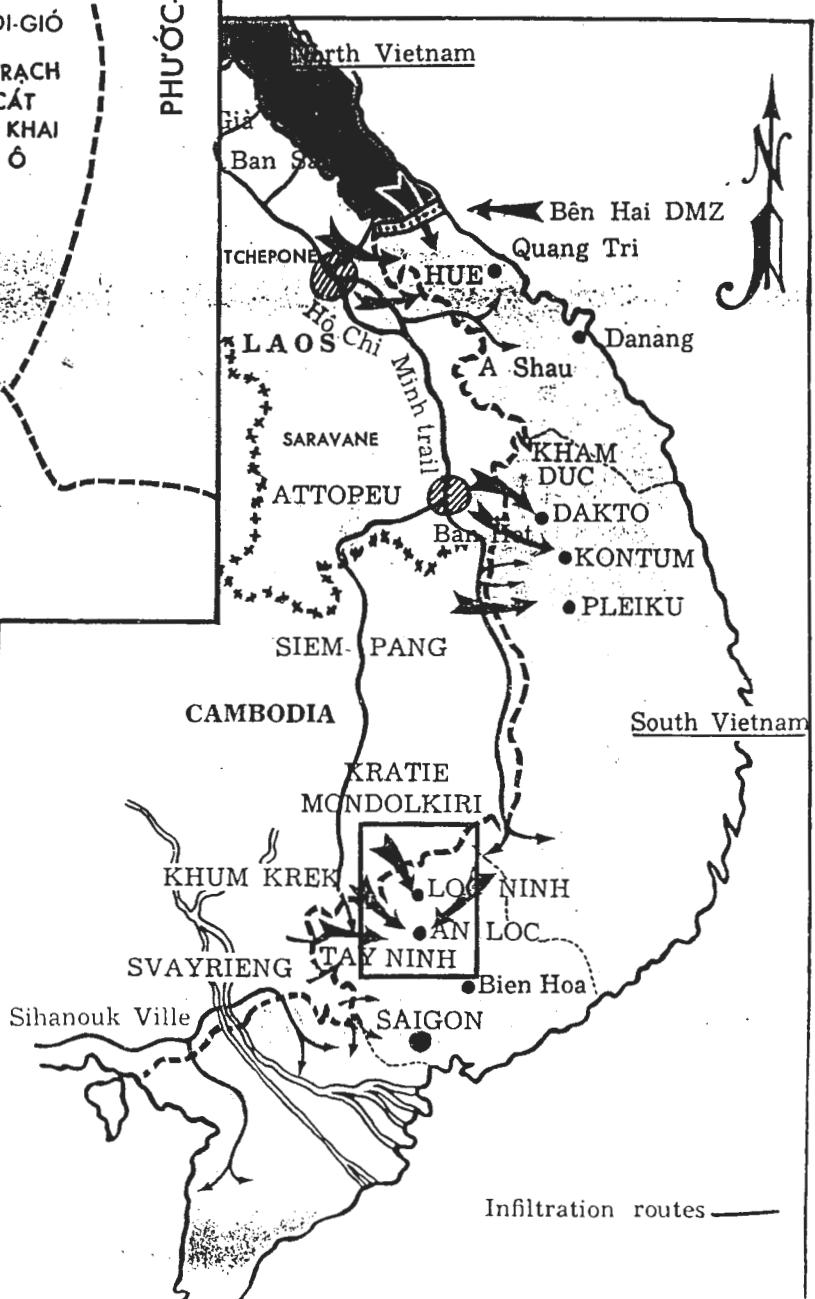
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Photo credits: — Ministry of Information
Psychological Warfare Department, RVNAF.

Lt. Col. Paul D. Mather





THE SIEGE OF AN LOC



THREE MAJOR FRONTS OF
THE INVASION: QUANG TRI,
KONTUM & BINH LONG

THE HEROIC BATTLE OF

AN LOC

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LATANTLY violating the 1954 Geneva Agreements, on March 29, 1972, 15 regular Infantry Divisions of the Communist North Vietnamese Army supported by anti-aircraft cannons, surface-to-air missiles, long-range artillery and Russian-made modern tanks openly crossed the Demilitarized Zone thus officializing their full-scale invasion of the territory of the Republic of Vietnam.

One of the speculations about Communist North Vietnamese military leaders' venture which shattered the NLF's myth of people's uprising war was that they believed, with the might of Communist Powers' sophisticated weaponry, they would be able to smash the RVN Armed Forces within a few weeks.

According to a top Communist document captured by RVN troops, HANOI had intended to occupy some parts of the South Vietnamese territory to seat its so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. To achieve this objective, Communist North Vietnamese Army struck on three major fronts: QUANG TRI, KONTUM and BINH LONG, whose provincial capital, AN LOC, has become famous the world over.

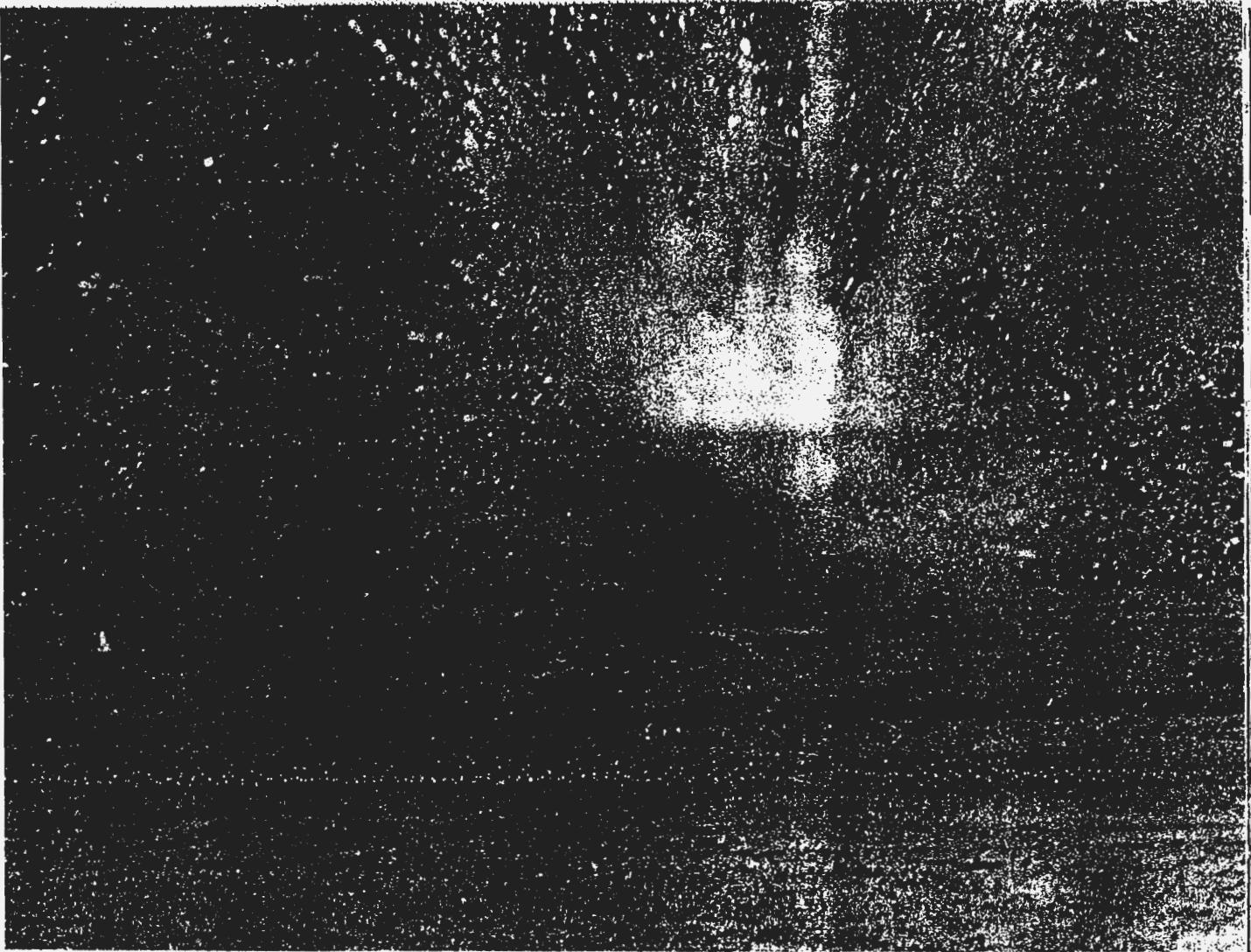
AN LOC had been chosen as one of the main targets by HANOI military leaders, essentially by the NVA Commander-in-chief, General VO NGUYEN GIAP of well-known DIEN BIEN PHU battle of 1954, because of its strategic and logistical situation. Surrounded by thick rubber plantations and hills, and adjacent to Cambodian border, the capture of AN LOC would tremendously help the Communists in troop movements, supplies, transportation and supports for maintaining high degree of intensity and duration in their general offensive. Once controlled, the 7,000 population town of AN LOC, about 100 kilometers north of SAIGON, would become a Communist North Vietnamese Army's ideal base and a big threat for SAIGON, the Capital of the Republic of Vietnam.

On April 5, 1972, the Communist North Vietnamese Army deployed an estimated 52,000 men of their 5th, 7th, 9th and C.30B Infantry Divisions coordinated with local units and supported by two tank regiments with Russian made T-54, PT-76 and PTR-50's, three artillery regiments, and one anti-aircraft regiment with 105, 130, 155mm cannons, anti-aircraft guns 57, portable SA-7 heat-hunting rockets and A-83 ground-missiles, crossed the Cambodian border to encircle the small town whose superficy is hardly 4 square kilometers. Defending it at the very first moment of the assault were local militia and about 1,000 soldiers from the RVN Armed Forces' 5th Infantry Division under the command of Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG who vowed to die with the town if need be. Immediately, by order of Lieutenant General NGUYEN VAN MINH, Commander of 3rd Tactical Region, 3 airborne battalions and one paratroop ranger battalion were airlifted into AN LOC to reinforce the defenders.

In an effort to overrun AN LOC before April 20, 1972, the Communist North Vietnamese Army assaulted it with wave after wave of suicide troops backed by ferocious artillery barrage and columns of tanks. The defenders infantrymen and paratroopers with neither tank nor artillery had to face the attack from all sides, the NVA's 5th division pushing in from the North, the NVA's 7th division from the South cutting off the supply route of highway 13, the NVA's C.30B division from the East, and the elite NVA's 9th division from the West.

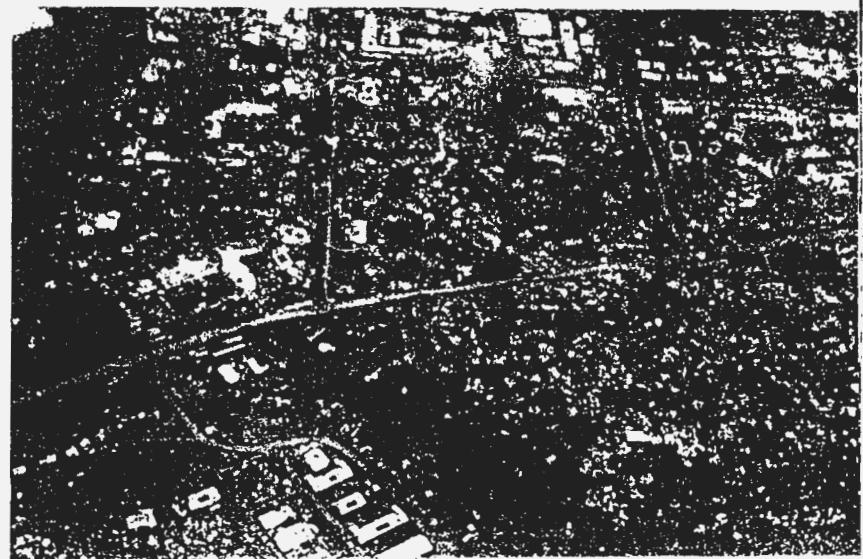
The enemy had been continuously pouring into the little town thousands of rounds each day during the whole 67 days and nights of long resistance. At one time of the siege, NVA assault forces were at 8 meters to the Headquarters of Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG. RVN and Allied Air Forces had to strike within the defense perimeter. During the siege, RVN pilots stubbornly disregarded security flying rule, came through NVA anti-aircraft and ground-missile firing net, down to an altitude of about 20 meters to make sure the supply would reach friend units, but some of the drops still missed the targets because the enemy were quite close to RVN forces.

Under this uninterrupted terrifying pressure, General LE VAN HUNG and their men courageously pushed back all of the enemy's massive assults. In spite of unfavorable balance in strength and difficulties of supply, evacuation and transportation, the AN LOC defenders, with help from the Airborne and 21st Infantry Divisions which had been trying to push to the town from the South, and supports from RVN and Allied Air Forces, have inflicted very heavy losses to the invaders in men and weaponry. Up to July 7, 1972, enemy casualties were recorded 30,000 killed, 4 captured and 3 returnees (not including thousands of others killed and injured being carried away), 219 tanks and 6 trucks destroyed, 11,346 assorted weapons captured, and numerous others destroyed.



... « The siege of AN LOC began on April 7, 1972 with a ferocious artillery barrage, followed by a tank-led infantry assault. »...

Aerial view of AN LOC.





Irresponsible of what could happen to the population, the Communist North Vietnamese invaders showered AN LOC with mortars, rockets and rounds of artillery bringing about disaster to the little town. Terrified by Communists' atrocious shelling, AN LOC inhabitants were rushing out of town with the help of RVN Armed Forces. Some of them unfortunately could not get through the Communist ambushes.





On June 8, 1972, in a very fierce counter-attack, RVNAF victoriously broke through NVA offensive line south of AN LOC where the enemy lost 400 men, thus reluctantly yielding way for the first time in 63 days of siege to outside RVNAF units to rejoin the defenders inside. This was the happiest day for the defending forces when helicopters could safely land in to pick up the injureds, civilians, as well as to supply and replace exhausted combatants. It was also the most memorable day since it puts an end to the North Vietnamese Communists' contention of renewing a second DIEN BIEN PHU, this time in the South and against the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces.

On June 12, 1972, the RVN flag was flying on top of Dong Long hill. Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG, the hero of AN LOC, declared the siege of AN LOC completely broken off.

By the end of June 1972, RVN Armed Forces controlled most of important strategic positions surrounding AN LOC. Enemy shelling was reduced to about 20 to 30 rounds each day. On July 7, 1972, RVN President NGUYEN VAN THIEU made his historic observation tour to AN LOC visiting and paying tribute to national heroes who had successfully crushed Communists' dream of domination of South Vietnam. Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG and those who contributed to the defense of AN LOC, by this greatest victory of all times, have just written a new glorious chapter in the long and heroic history of the RVN Armed Forces.

The unknown little town in the rubber plantation area has now become worldwide famous. But celebrity has its price. AN LOC had paid the cost of total destruction and thousands of dead and wounded. At the same time, AN LOC has become the symbol of South Vietnamese people's determination to remain free, the symbol of the victory of Democracy over Communist Totalitarianism.

Addressing RVN soldiers and Vietnamese people from General LE VAN HUNG's Headquarters on July 7, 1972, RVN President NGUYEN VAN THIEU confirmed: « AN LOC victory was not only a victory of the RVN Armed Forces over the three enemy Divisions but also a victory of our nation over Communist North Vietnam's theories of revolutionary, liberation and people war. This is also a victory of the Free World ».



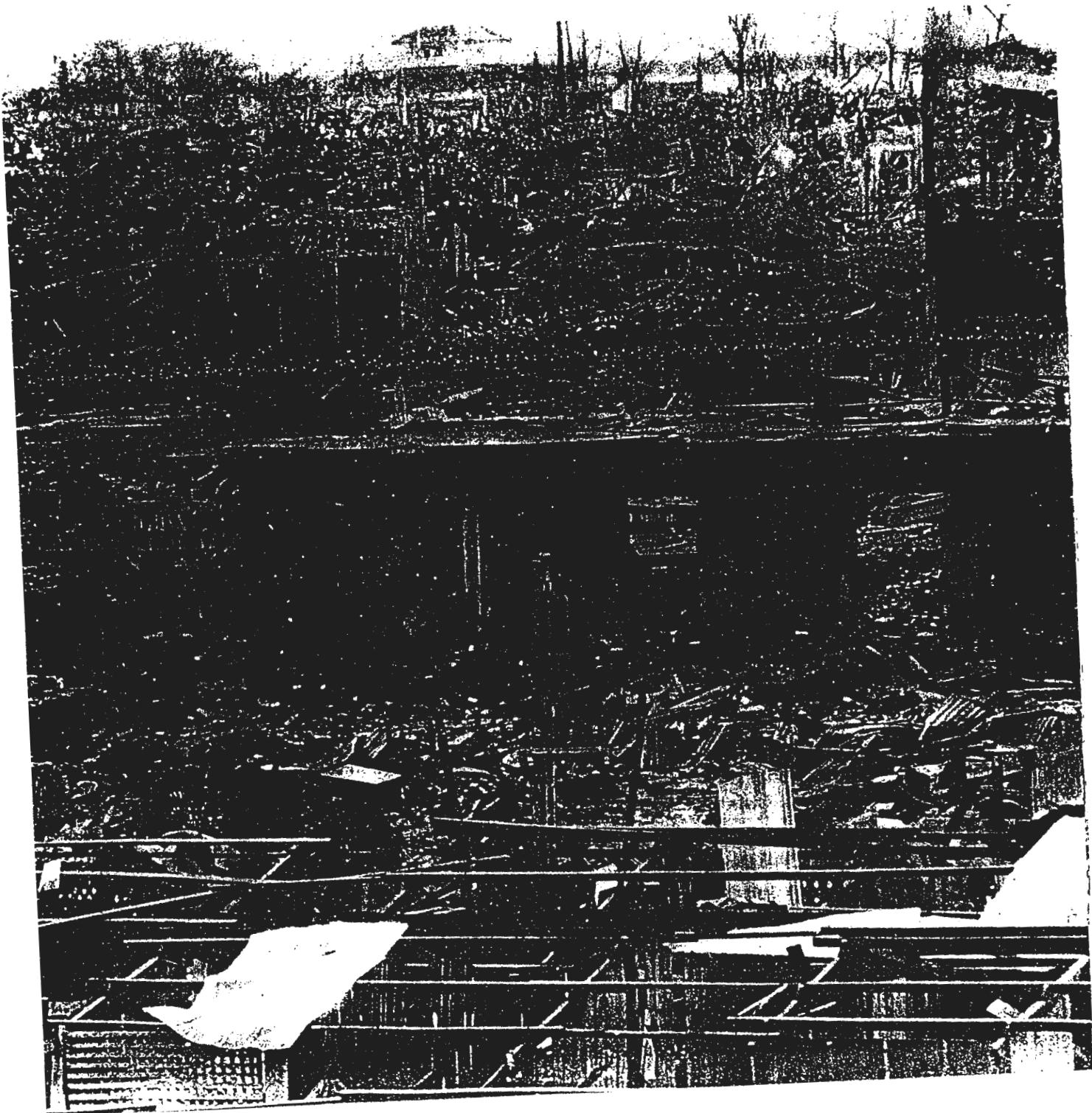
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Communist North Vietnam invasion destroyed most of the town's constructions, buildings, schools, hospital, temple, church, pagoda, houses.



Enemy artillery each day pumped in not less than 1,000 rounds, in normal times, generally about 2,000 rounds, and when an assault was coming, 7,000 to 8,000 rounds.



The heavily battered AN LOC

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... The heavily battered AN LOC evokes at least a passing grunt of admiration from the most hardened old pros in US uniform. The fact of the matter is that « they » have been doing pretty heroically at AN LOC.

Down there in III Corps, two North Vietnamese divisions, the 9th and the 5th, were besieging elements of the ARVN 5th Division, plus some Airborne and Ranger troops. AN LOC was not a fortified position, it was an exposed little province town at the back of beyond.

In AN LOC, the ARVN soldiers took up to a couple of thousand artillery rounds each day and met and killed a couple of tank battalions, mostly with their own anti-tank weapons.

At best, they were tenuously supplied, for there was no supply except by air, and the enemy's powerful new anti-aircraft guns repeatedly throttled the supply flow. For the same reason, none of the wounded were evacuated.

After three weeks' hard fighting, there were above a thousand wounded for a couple of harassed doctors to care for.

In short, AN LOC was a great deal nastier than KHE SANH, which was under similar fierce attack in 1968. The artillery fire was much lighter there, and the men in KHE SANH, of course, were US Marines.

Yet at home, they wrote in anguish about the « agony of KHE SANH », whereas the defence of AN LOC, when it has been noticed at all, has been customarily described with patronising contempt.

What would cause a nation-wide outcry if US troops were involved has become a wire service holiday because the troops involved are South Vietnamese.

In fact defenders of AN LOC have torn the guts out of two North Vietnamese divisions, thereby probably releasing reserves to meet the crisis at Pleiku.

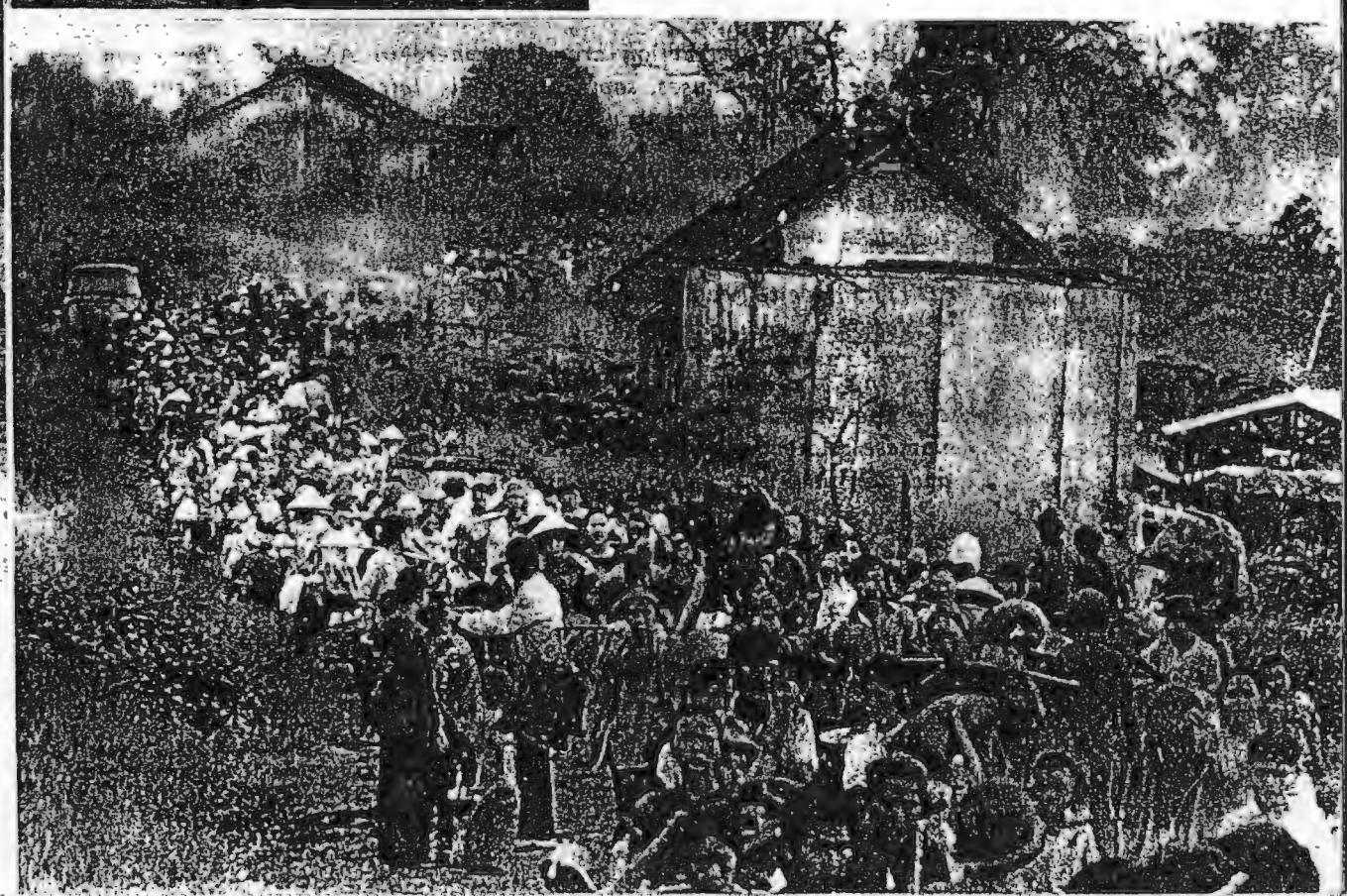
ARVN has the equivalent of 15 divisions, if you count the tough little Ranger groups. All have been engaged. Most have been heavily, even murderously engaged since the North Vietnamese offensive began...

LOS ANGELES TIMES





Using every available means to escape from death or mutilation, these women and children with a white flag-like sign instantly made up with a white shirt chose to risk through the communist fires to join the group of refugees under RVNAF protection rather than wait to be killed by the invaders.



THE HORROR OF AN LOC'S 70 - DAY ORDEAL

THE market place of AN LOC is a graveyard today with row upon row of brown dirt mounds where the vegetable stalls of a bustling rubber plantation town used to be.

Someone has roughly scratched the words « The fatherland is grateful to you » on a concrete slab nearby.

I arrived in AN LOC yesterday by motorcycle after jumping off a helicopter which flew to a point about a mile south of the town to pick up some of the South Vietnamese soldiers wounded in the communist siege.

Death and destruction are everywhere in AN LOC. There can be no more than 10 houses, some just shells, left standing after the 70-day siege by possibly as many as 10,000 North Vietnamese troops.

The North Vietnamese were driven from their roadblock round the town jail to the extreme south of the city last night, but communist rocketing and shelling continue.

You have to keep moving. A rocket whirrs in and there is a shattering explosion. A man falls dead or wounded, but he is left behind in the hurry to seek shelter.

The stench of death makes you retch. I saw the bodies of North Vietnamese soldiers near a smashed T-54 tank. After lying for weeks in sun and rain they had decomposed almost to skeletons.

A group of refugees, pale and thin, come straggling back into the city. They started to move south along the highway but the North Vietnamese were still ambushing the road so they came back. A man asks me for a cigarette. In AN LOC a packet sells for 15 times its orginal price.

The refugees have been living in the bunkers with the soldiers, sharing their rations and waiting for the day when they could escape. Some 10,000 have already reached safety. At least 3,000 civilians are dead, wounded or missing, according to official figures.

A South Vietnamese officer told me that to his comrades the battle for AN LOC had been as decisive as DIEN BIEN PHU was in the defeat of the French in 1954.

They say that the North Vietnamese bombardment of rockets, shells and mortar bombs, which at its peak reached 10,000 rounds on one day, was twice as heavy as the attack on the French garrison.

But AN LOC's defenders have been supported by American and South Vietnamese air strikes. These have dropped thousands of tons of bombs in the rubber plantations surrounding the town where the North Vietnamese are based.

« Hey, you want to see the tank I got? » a South Vietnamese soldier asks, pointing to a squat Russian-built tank in a bomb crater near by. He gets in and starts the engine and the tank growls slowly backward. The lens protector of my camera has been damaged and he gives me the rubber cap from the gun sight inside the tank...

After spending the night in the shell of a house with Government forces, I prepare to catch a helicopter back to the south towards SAIGON, carrying with me at least 50 letters from the troops of AN LOC to their families.

THE TIMES





RVN Government and Armed Forces transportations were the unique hope for these innocents to flee away from the Communist invaders' indiscriminate shellings...

...leaving behind their disastrous home town to be the unforgettable battlefield between RVN defense forces and Communist North Vietnamese invaders.



Refugees escape from

AN LOC

AFTER 67 days, the North Vietnamese siege of AN LOC eased a bit early yesterday when a trickle of refugees that began leaving the devastated provincial capital became a flood of 10,000 people desperately scurrying over broken bridges, past bomb craters and burned-out vehicles, to government lines.

Alongside Highway 13, the forward elements of the South Vietnamese 21st Division, which has been trying for weeks to open the road, continued routing out diehard enemy infantrymen food by foot from trenches and foxholes.

Inside the city, Vietnamese airborne troopers, who linked up last week with the embattled defenders, were probing gingerly at the last North Vietnamese strongpoints, particularly a rubber-processing plant where tanks and infantrymen are still dug in.

The refugees who started out from AN LOC at dawn got through anyway, covering the 12 miles from AN LOC south to a fire base near CHON THANH in about eight hours in the searing sun.

They were in a solid block on the highway about a mile long, mainly old men and women, with most of the women carrying babies. They were the color of the red earth of BINH LONG province, and one young wife, Pham Thi Nghia, told why.

« We lived 64 days in the bunkers », she said. « We left to go to the toilet, or to collect food from the airdrops. Otherwise, we stayed underground. »

She said one enemy rocket scored a direct hit on her bunker and killed her mother and son, and two others. « I buried my mother and son in the bunker », she said tearfully.

Others shook their heads with fear when asked to tell about their ordeal in the besieged city.

THE BALTIMORE SUN.



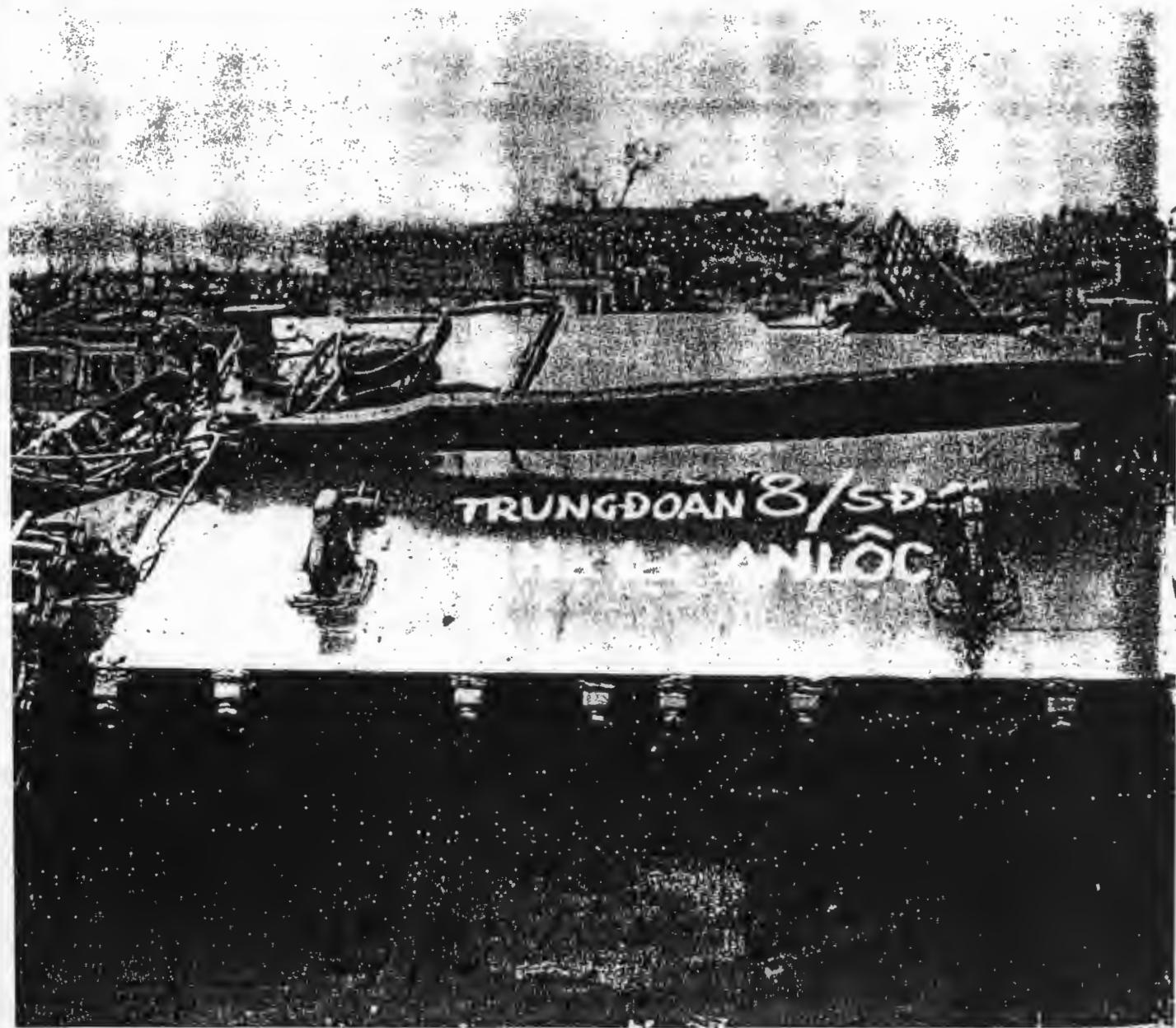
...« After 67 days, the North Vietnamese siege of AN LOC eased a bit early yesterday when a trickle of refugees that began leaving the devastated provincial capital became a flood of 10,000 people desperately scurrying over broken bridges, past bomb craters and burned-out vehicles, to Government lines. »...



...« However, at midday today, the few North Vietnamese still along the road fired directly into the stream of refugees, mostly oldmen and women and children. The refugees were carrying their last possessions — pots, pans, clothes — on their backs »..



Hoping to grasp AN LOC in a few weeks by massive attacks with supports by artillery barrage and tanks, Communist North Vietnamese invaders' 5th, 7th, 9th, C.30B Divisions were totally defeated after their first attempts leaving behind 47 Russian made tanks destroyed and thousands of soldiers killed.





...« The AN LOC perimeter was repeatedly penetrated. The tanks came into town again and again, only to be destroyed where they were »...

HEROISM

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HE South Vietnamese defence of AN LOC has been truly heroic. To start at the beginning, Hanoi ordered AN LOC to be taken « at all costs », chiefly because of the successful elimination of the Viet Cong by the pacification programme.

In the old days, the Viet Cong would have been used to « prepare the battlefield » by building supplies, providing guides and supporting units, and so on and on.

In the old days, therefore, the crucial battle on the approaches to SAIGON would have taken place much further forward. But now there are almost no Viet Cong.

Hence AN LOC was chosen as the enemy's main target — because it is at the back of beyond, a « province capital » with a population of 7,000, in a province almost empty of people.

A road concealed under the jungle canopy also connects it with the Cambodian border, so an attack there could be supplied by truck.

The siege of AN LOC began on April 7, with a ferocious artillery barrage, followed by a tankled infantry assault. At that time, the town was held by two regiments of one of South Vietnam's less admired divisions, the 5th.

The first assault came close to penetrating the provincial headquarters, and actually reached the fringes of the ARVN's 5th Division command post.

But for want of anything better, the ARVN troops who included some very brave regional force companies killed the tanks at almost point-blank range with their bazookalike anti-tank weapons and what remained of the enemy was thrown out of town.

About 10 days later, this reporter flew over AN LOC with the chief American officer in the area, Major General James Hollingsworth.

BUT THEY HELD

You could not see AN LOC itself because of the never-lifting smoke of battle ; by then, a brigade of South Vietnamese airborne troops had been lifted in to help.

AT AN LOC

General Hollingsworth said : « They're taking real hell in there. I can't tell you whether they can hold. »

One could understand General Hollingsworth's doubts. The unit besieging AN LOC was Hanoi's crack division in the south, the 9th, augmented with an entire regiment of T-54 tanks. Initially, too, the 9th Division had some help from the 5th.

The AN LOC perimeter was repeatedly penetrated. The tanks came into town again and again, only to be destroyed where they were.

American news agencies announced the fall of AN LOC at least five times. But AN LOC did not fall.

Instead, by April 26, HANOI's once awe-inspiring 9th Division had just about expended itself. Its commander was allowed to pull his men out after a stinging reprimand from HANOI.

BADLY MAULED

HANOI's 5th Division now moved up, with its commander boastfully promising to take AN LOC in three days.

He tried hard between May 10 and May 15. By then the 5th North Vietnamese Division had also been expended and had to be pulled back.

Two whole enemy divisions had broken themselves in a futile bid to take a miserable little unfortified town with an area of perhaps three kilometers.

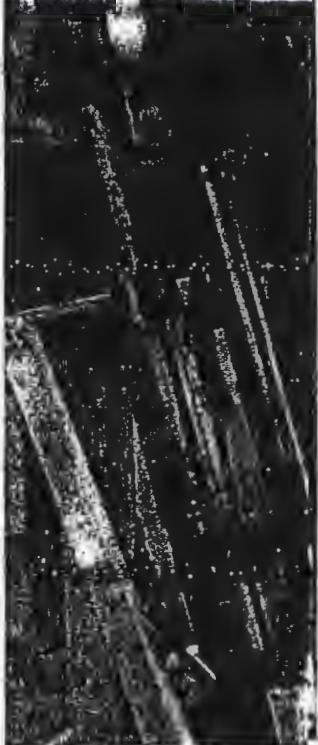
Even when there were no ground assaults, enemy artillery each day pumped in never less than 1,000 rounds, in normal times, generally about 2,000 rounds, and when an assault was coming, 7,000 to 8,000 rounds.

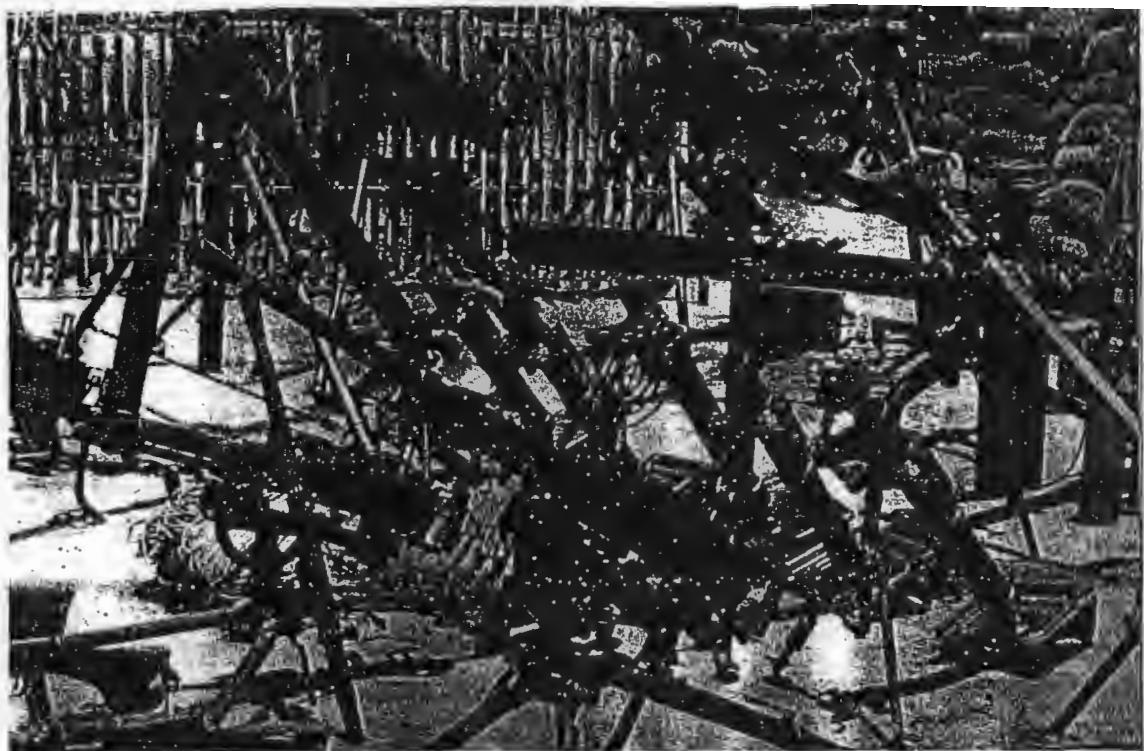
It must have been like being on the receiving end of one of Soviet Marshal Georgi Zhukov's barrages in World War II.

All this time there was no medical evacuation from AN LOC — though when this reporter was on the scene, there were already 1,000 wounded.

Was this really « pitiful » and « craven » — to quote one U.S. reporter on the subject of the South Vietnam Army ? How many U.S. units would have held on as well as the South Vietnamese did at AN LOC ?

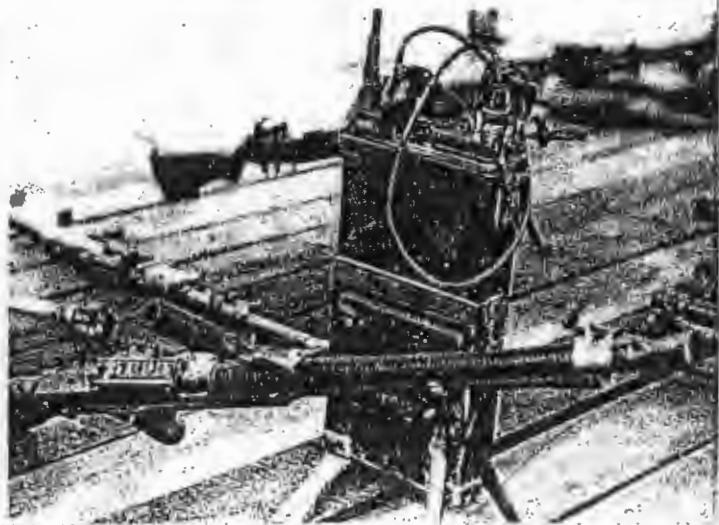
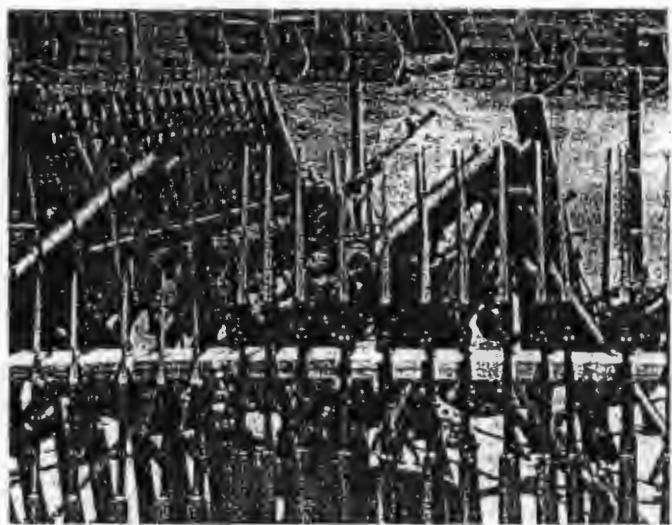
*« It is about time to say that although ARVN has a far from perfect record, ARVN has a
mn good record in the recent battles. ARVN has proved itself, which is an important fact. »...*

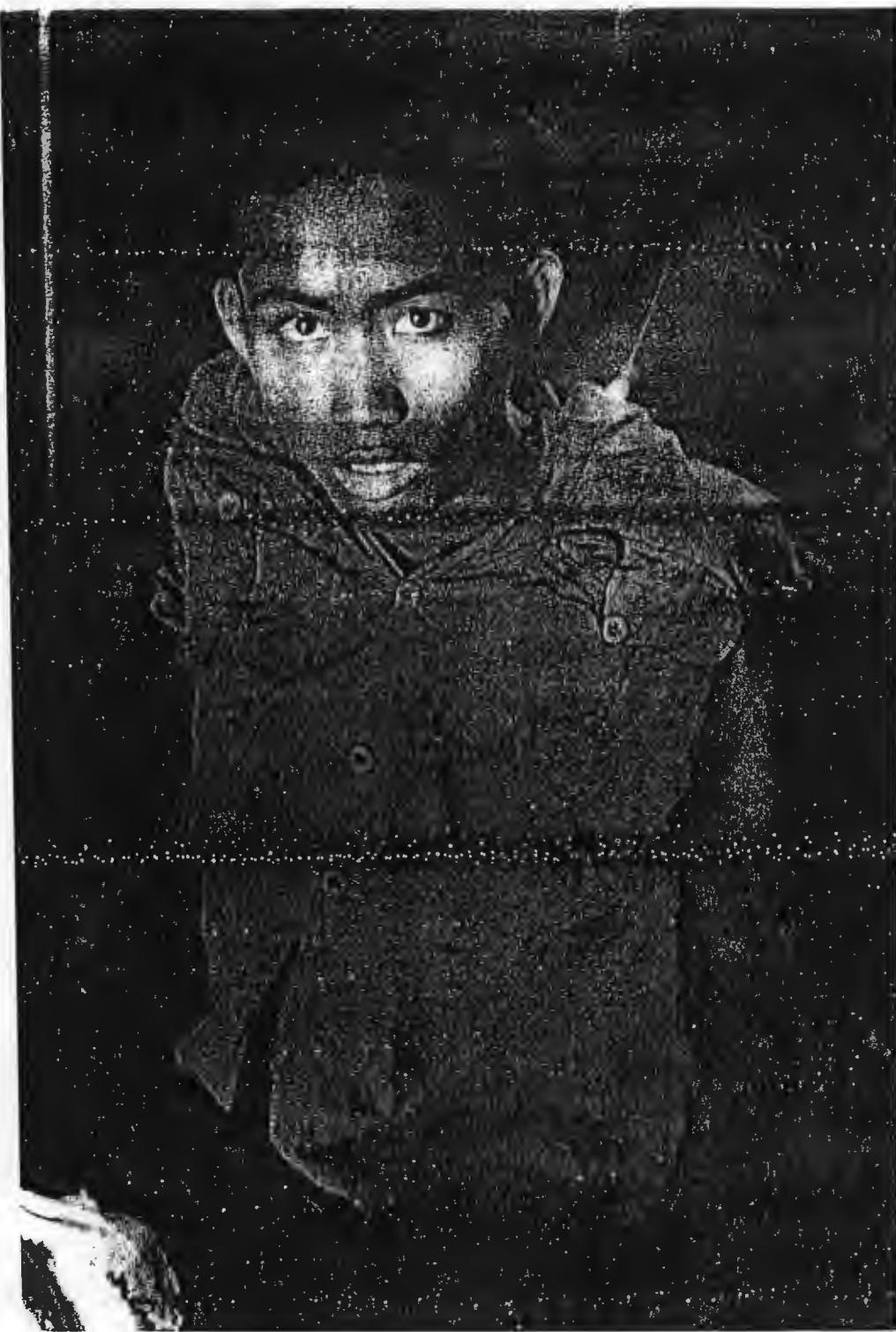




Up to July 7, 1972, Communists' losses in weaponry were recorded

1046 crew-served weapons, 8878 individual weapons, 1302 grenades,
120 rockets captured and several others destroyed by RVNAF.





The misjudgement of RVNAF strength and capability has cost the Communist North Vietnamese invaders, at AN LOC battlefield alone, 30,000 soldiers killed, thousands of others injured or killed being carried away by fellows, 4 captured, and 3 returnees.



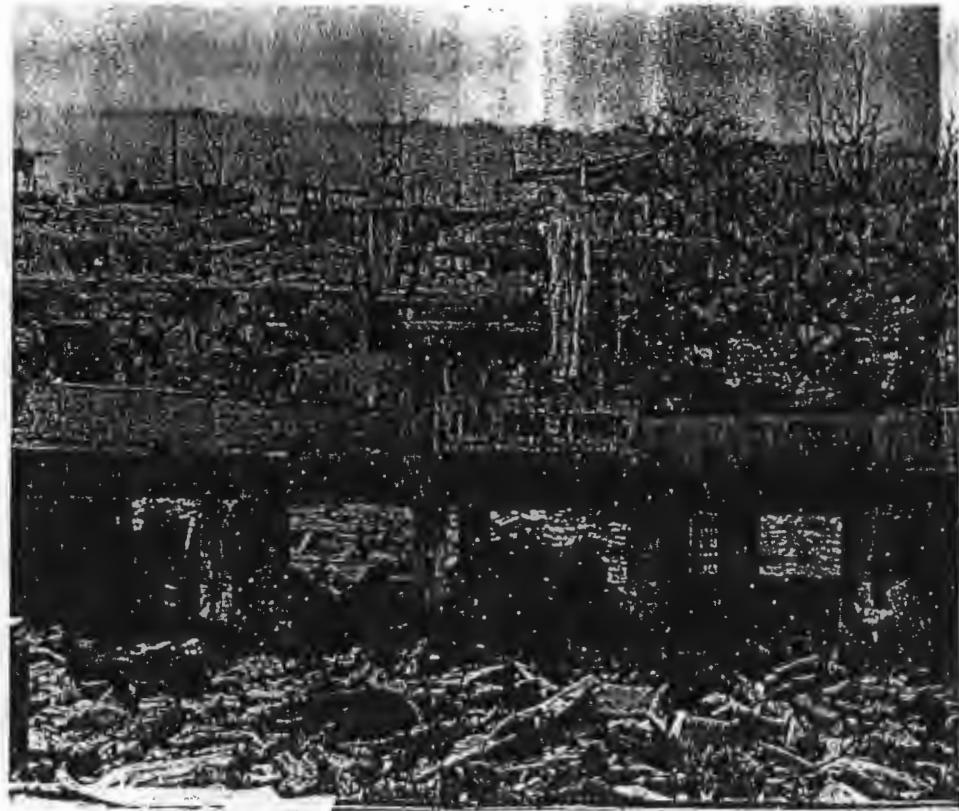
These two returnees had been telling newsmen that they had been instructed to go South to liberate people who would be rising up wherever they went. But when facing the people's determination as well as the strength and capability of RVNAF, they had been very shocked, frightened and desperate. They had wanted to go back home. But recently they had been forced to take tranquilizers many times a day; Others had been chained together, to tanks or artillery bases. Here, happy to be alive and humanly treated by RVNAF, they were trying to tell the true story to their friends by letters.

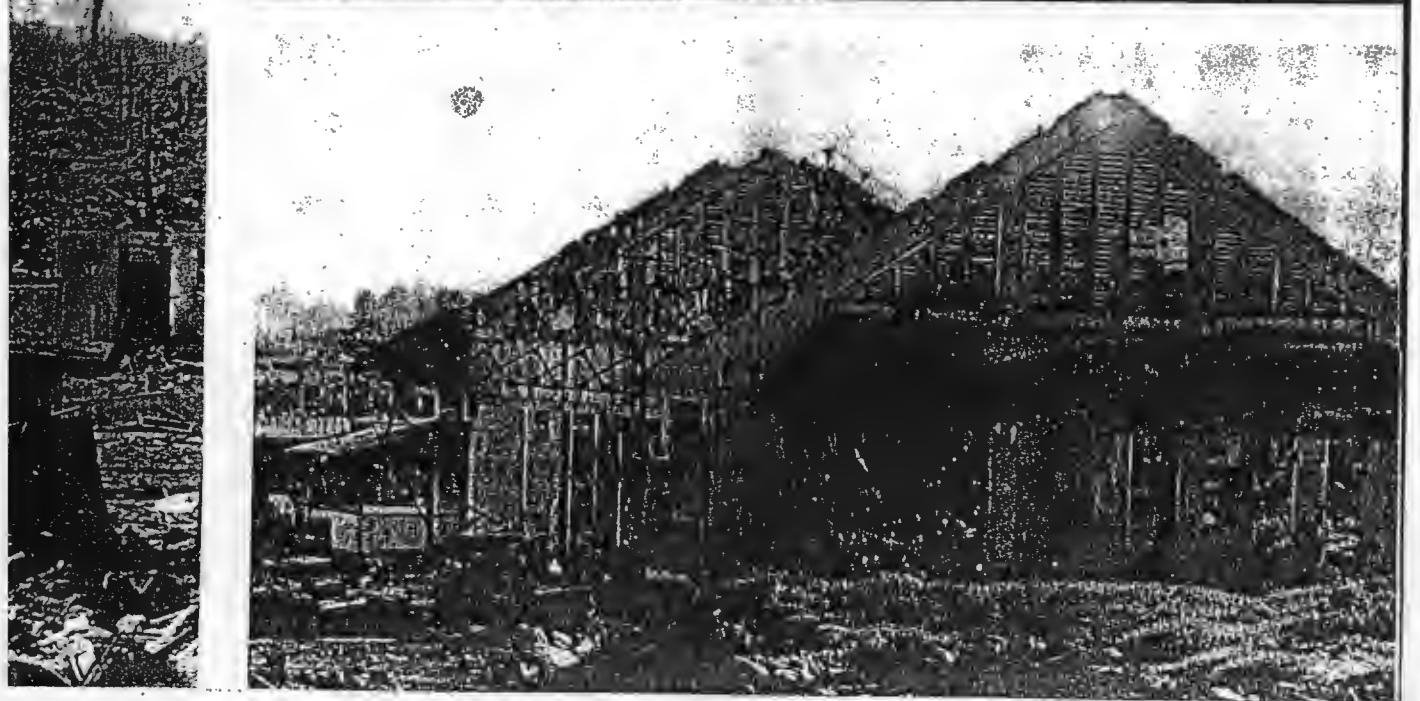
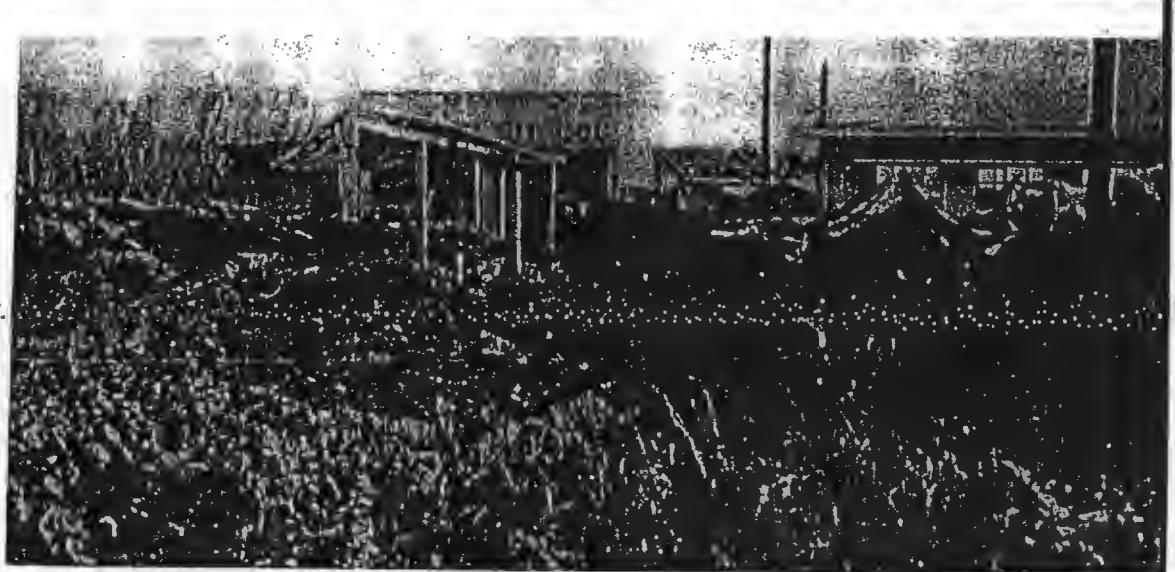


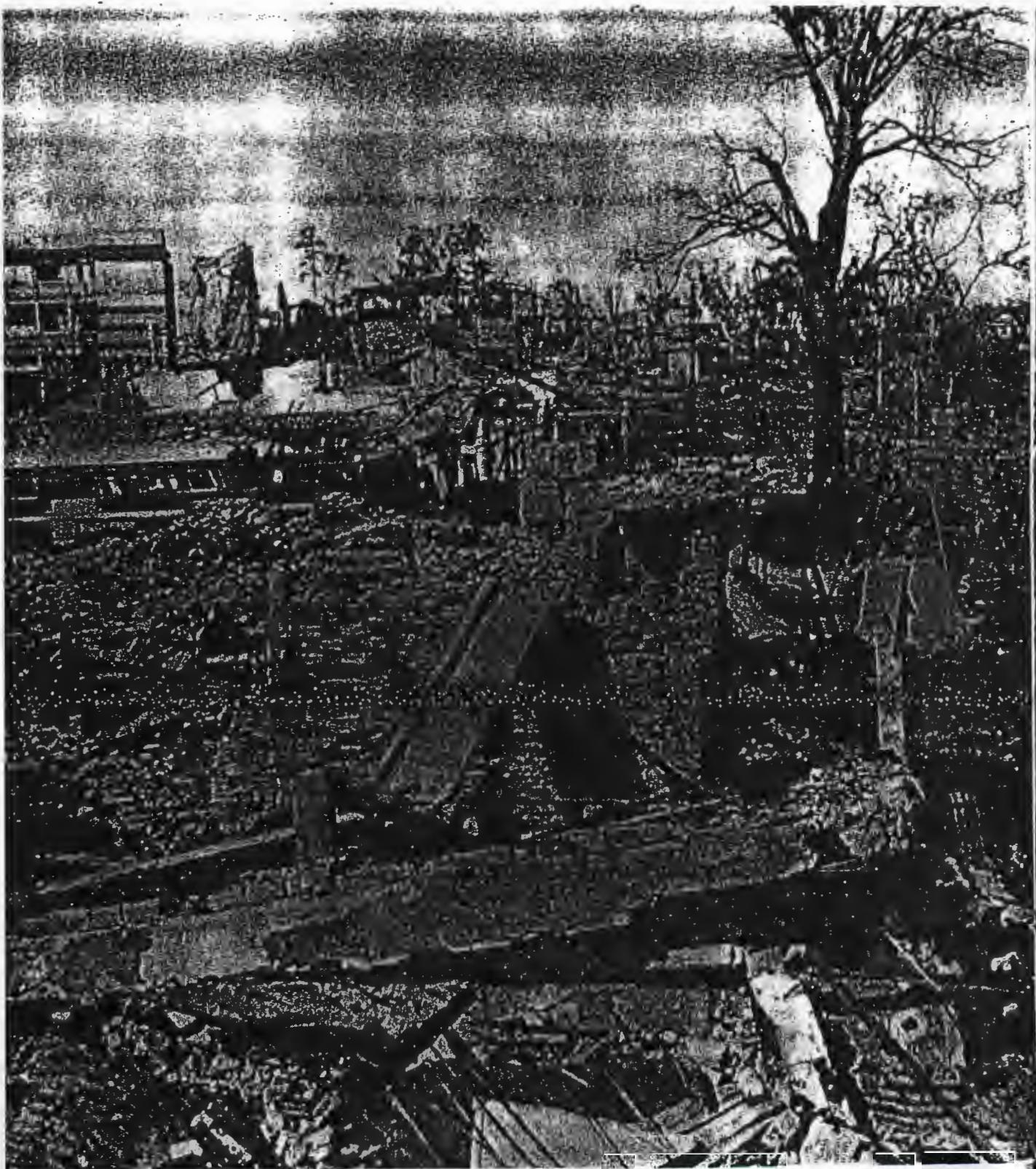


Among enemy dead bodies lying around the town, many of them were found chained together, to their tanks or artillery bases.

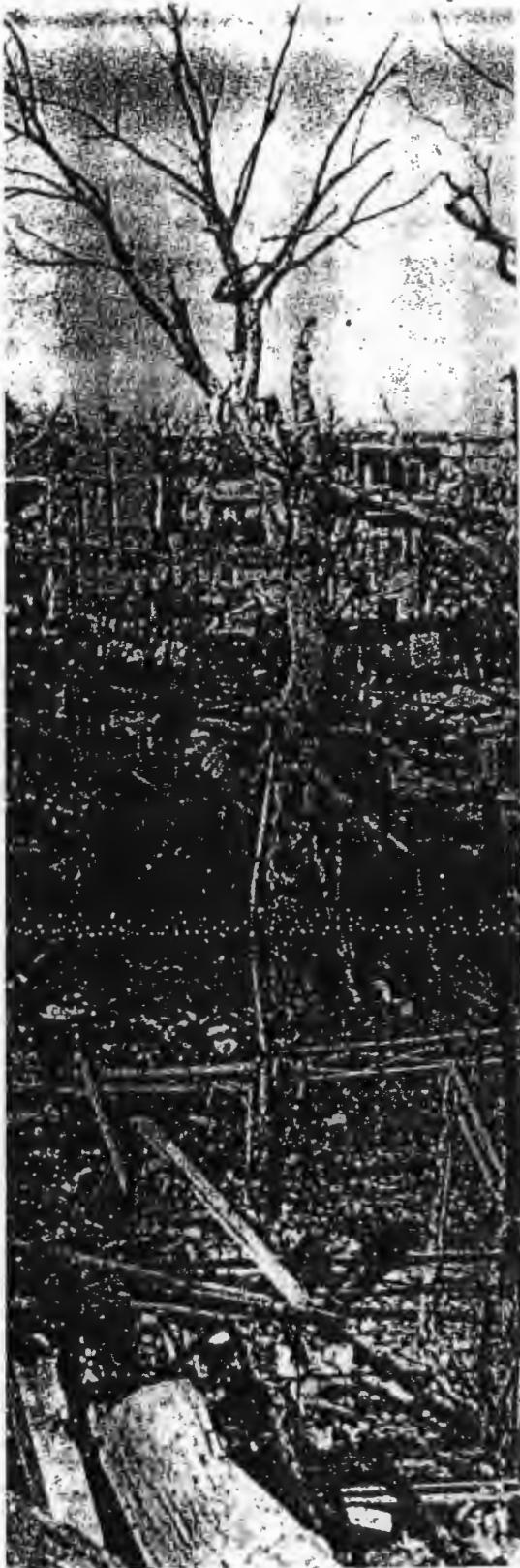
After 67 long days and nights of confrontation between 6,000 defenders and 52,000 invaders, the little town of AN LOC has become the world historic scene of RVNAF valiant endurance.







Today, life begins again in this VERDUN or STALINGRAD scenery, where the REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM ARMY gave proof of its capacity to withstand and that NIXON's vietnamization was not a lure. AN LOC, 50,000 shells and rockets, 90 days and nights of shelling and rocketting. Civilians themselves destroyed 14 Russian made T-54 tanks in the main street.



In AN LOC, the Vietnamese VERDUN, mass ceremonies are held again.



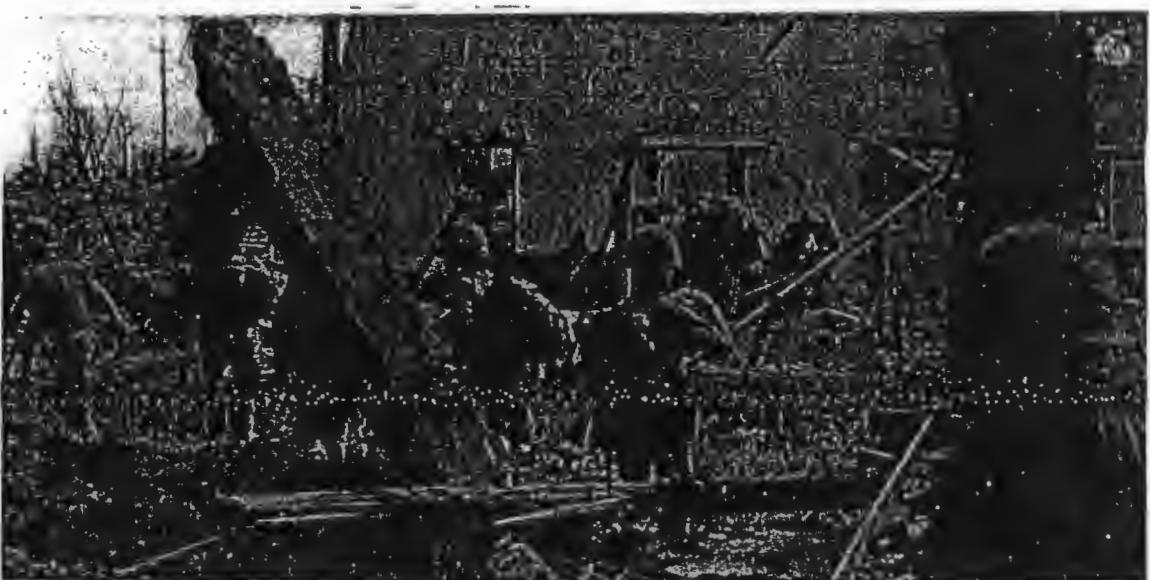


Determined to break off Communist design to capture AN LOC and build it up into a strategic base, RVNAF soldiers were searching in every corner of the ruined town for possible remnant Communist North Vietnam soldiers.

... «AN LOC, the little provincial capital 60 miles north of SAIGON, which had been encircled by up to 40,000 enemy soldiers, stubbornly refused to yield to the Communist pressure. By late May, probably because of crippling losses — an estimated 20,000 casualties and a reported 60 tanks destroyed — NVA commanders had to disengage, leaving only small formations behind that had to resort to suicide tactics to slow down the advance of the Government relief column up Route 13. »...



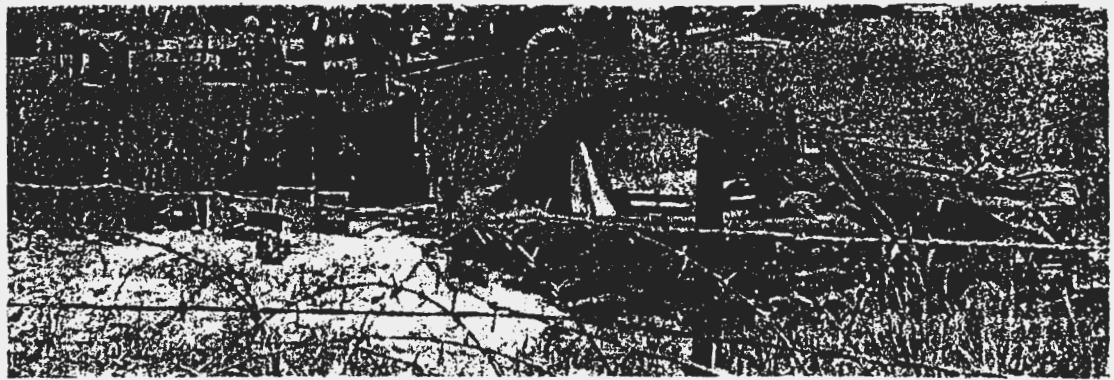




In 67 long days and nights under enemy terrifying pressure and enormous difficulties in supply, evacuation and transportation, Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG, commanding general of the RVNAF 5th Infantry Division and the outstanding defenders have successfully pushed back all of the invaders' massive assaults.

...“ And the South Vietnamese Army is really opposed to communism and is a patriotic Army. The young and the old are on duty to prevent the spreading of communism and to protect the country from this inauspicious calamity. The free world is with anyone who resists communism. ”...





RVN Armed Forces in counter-offensive operations...

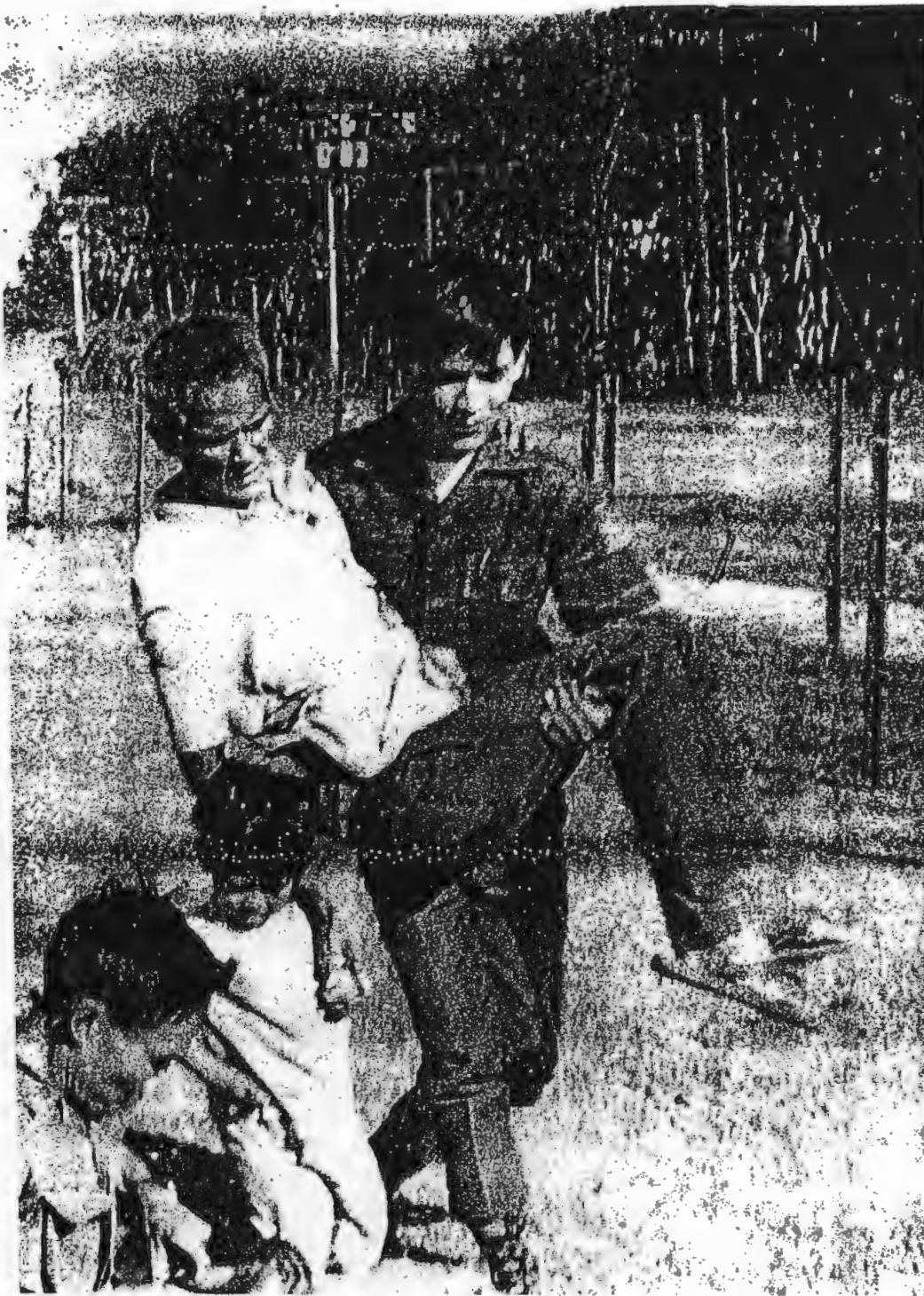


... once again have proved that General VO NGUYEN GIAP, hero of DIEN BIEN PHU battle, is no longer invincible, either in his 1972 full-scale invasion or in his 1968 general offensive.

« AN LOC was expected to fall at the first attack. Two months later AN LOC still stood fast. Proportionately speaking and with the exception of STALINGRAD, there was no equivalent to it in contemporary military history. AN LOC is becoming a symbol. Under the hurricanes of fire, AN LOC always withstood. Is it the Asian VERDUN ? For the sake of liberty, of ourselves, our honour and our future, AN LOC has stood firm. To the French people, AN LOC is the revenge of DIEN BIEN PHU. »

Gen. VANUXEM





Among other difficulties, the biggest problem for AN LOC defenders lies in their responsibility of providing help and protection to civilians against Communist NVA indiscriminate firings.





... « The refugees have been living in the bunkers with the soldiers, sharing their rations and waiting for the day when they could escape. Some 10,000 have already reached safety. At least 3,000 civilians are dead, wounded or missing. »...



REDS AMBUSH

I

T began as an almost joyous flight to freedom and ended at noon today in a hail of rifle fire and mortar rounds beside a stream five or six miles north of here.

« We just passed the stream when they began firing at us », said a gray-haired man carrying the almost lifeless form of his 5-year-old son. « The North Vietnamese didn't stop shooting at us until the airplanes flew over-head. Then we began running away ».

The man's son was shot in the arm and the stomach. He had carried him almost two miles before reaching the first South Vietnamese units north of this district town on the road to AN LOC.

WALK ALL THE WAY

« We had to walk all the way; we started at 3 o'clock this morning. » said the boy's mother. « Officers of the South Vietnamese army said the road was safe. They said we could leave ».

For most of the 10,000 civilians holed up in AN LOC during the two-month siege, Route 13 to CHON THANH, 15 miles south, was safe enough. They streamed out of AN LOC all day yesterday. They had survived in underground bunkers on army rice and brackish water and little else since the beginning of April.

However, at midday today, the few North Vietnamese still along the road fired directly into the stream of refugees, mostly old men and women and children. The refugees were carrying their last possessions — pots, pans, clothes — on their backs.

MEDICS ATTEND WOUNDED

The refugees were lying on the ground beside a Roman Catholic school here while South Vietnamese army medics administered shots and pills. None could guess how many were wounded or killed.

« At least 20 hurt », said one of the medics, but a South Vietnamese soldier said 10 bodies were also strewn along the road.

« One thousand more people walked out today », said Vu Duc Pho, 54, a farmer, hit in the foot by shrapnel. « They are still coming here. We tried to leave much earlier but couldn't because of the siege ».

AN LOC REFUGEES

For the citizens of AN LOC, the battle for the town was a day-and-night struggle to survive under one of the heaviest North Vietnamese mortar, rocket, and artillery barrages of the war.

« It happened all day and night », said Pho. « Then we thought it was safe to leave, and we just picked up what we had and started walking ».

WARNED OF DANGER

After passing by a couple of South Vietnamese units still fighting for the road, the refugees walked cautiously toward the brow of a slight hill. « The South Vietnamese soldiers warned us the road was dangerous here », said Pho. « But we knew others had gone thru and we walked on ».

It took hardly a moment for the North Vietnamese to mow down the column of civilians.

« They fired maybe four or five mortar rounds », said Pham Van Ngoc, an aging farmer, his head swathed in bandages. « I was with my grandchildren, but they were not hurt. They just fainted from exhaustion ».

SEVERAL UNCONSCIOUS

Pho was lucky. He was still standing and talking. Behind him were women and children barely able to breathe, old men staring empty-eyed at nothing, children were weeping and moaning.

Not all the children were weeping. Several were unconscious, breathing heavily. Their mothers, also bloodied, hovered over them, waving fans.

The victims of the ambush arrived every few minutes on South Vietnamese army trucks and jeeps. All of them had struggled on foot for a couple of miles from the point at which they were ambushed before the South Vietnamese could pick them up. A little girl and a middle-aged man scrambled from the back of a jeep with a gap-toothed old lady.

« She is my mother », explained the man, weeping almost as much as his daughter, aged 5 or 6. « She was shot in three places ».

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

AN LỘC dia, sứ ghi chiến tích
liệt Cánh Dơi vị quốc vong thân

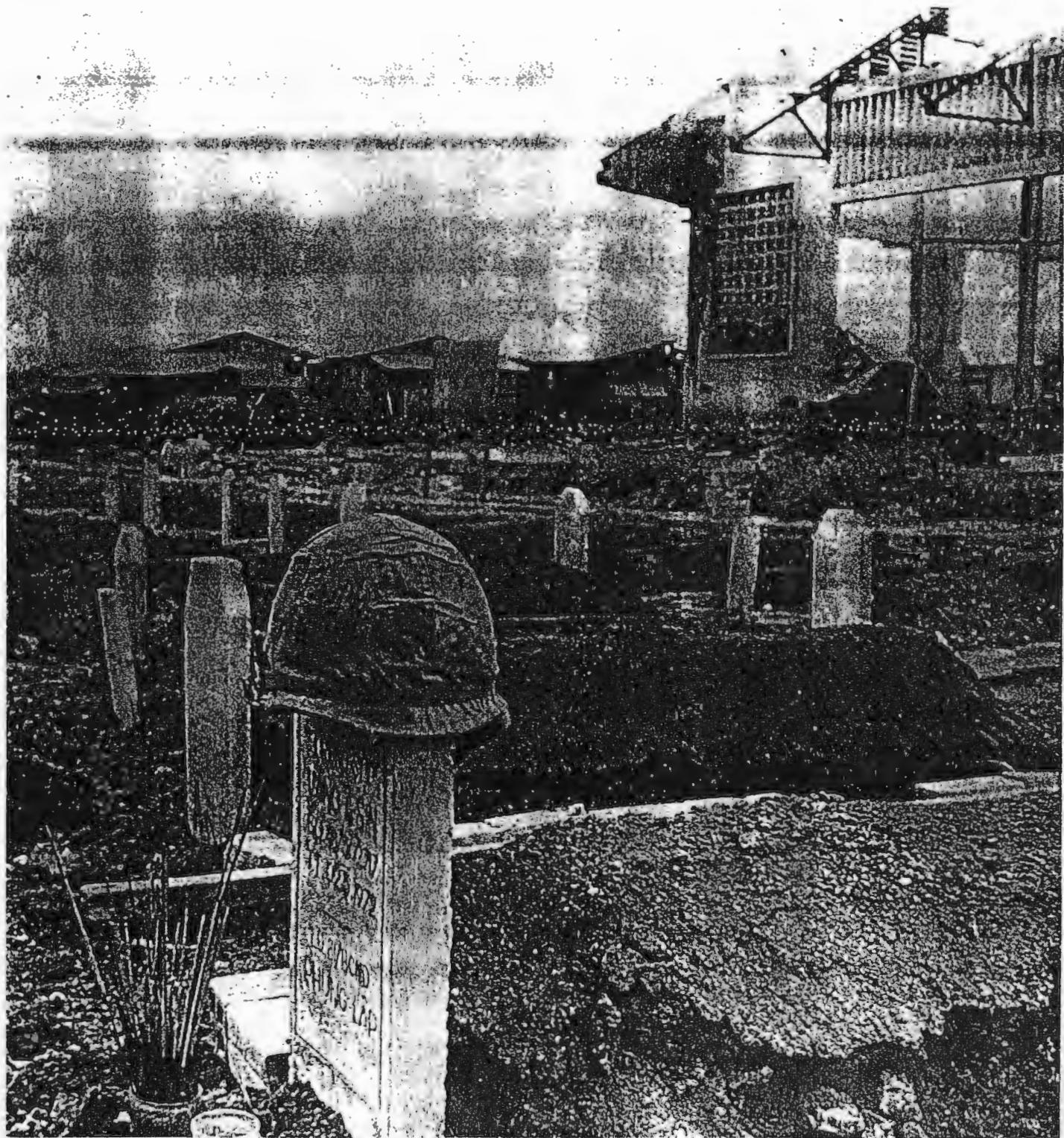
AN LOC, the seat of a long and terrible war, is now a graveyard of烈士. The country he Parrot Gunner, a name he gave to his unit, is now a graveyard of lives. The Parrot Gunner, a name he gave to his unit, is now a graveyard of lives. The Parrot Gunner, a name he gave to his unit, is now a graveyard of lives.



... « The market place of AN LOC is a graveyard today with row upon row of brown dirt mounds where the vegetable stalls of a bustling rubber plantation town used to be. Someone has roughly scratched the words THE FATHERLAND IS GRATEFUL TO YOU on a concrete slab nearby. »...



The valiant RVNAF soldiers and civilians who nobly sacrificed their lives in defending AN LOC against communist domination scheme rest in the heart of the town's soil. This world's unique graveyard accidentally put up by defending soldiers themselves testifies to the South Vietnamese people's determination to remain free and to preserve their fatherland and democratic way of life.



During 67 days and nights under siege and intense shelling, the only way for AN LOC defenders to get some clue about what's happening beyond the town was newspapers once in a while dropped in by air supports. This young man just wanted to share the « outside world » with his fellows.



AN LOC

debunks the myth of

DIEN BIEN PHU

EVEN though the North Vietnamese had surprise on their side, and were able to pick isolated targets, South Vietnamese cities have stood firmly up to the most savage battering and after months of siege have driven out the invaders and gone on to the offensive.

The defence of AN LOC is typical of the heroism shown by the South Vietnamese during the past few months of bloody fighting.

Only 60 miles from SAIGON, bordering a national highway, easily accessible to North Vietnamese infiltration routes, AN LOC fought savagely before it yielded an inch of territory.

During the initial stage of the attack, the North Vietnamese poured in hundreds of thousands of rockets and artillery shells and attacked with a formidable number of Soviet tanks, but neither shells nor heavy armour managed to destroy AN LOC's morale — and ultimately it was morale far more than American air strikes that turned the tide.

IT JUST HELD ON

DIEN BIEN PHU fell once the Communists had broken through its defences. AN LOC held — and held. Where DIEN BIEN PHU lasted 56 days before collapse, AN LOC hung on 70 days before driving the Communists out leaving the town strewn with the wreckage of field guns and derelict Soviet T-54s.

AN LOC had no lack of heroes. At one stage two enemy machine guns strategically positioned to cover the main road into the city took a terrible toll of reinforcements; the South Vietnamese did not stand helplessly by as the French had eighteen years earlier — an ARVN soldier, defying almost certain death rushed the gun emplacements and silenced them single-handed.

At DIEN BIEN PHU, the Viet-Minh were fighting foreigners, at AN LOC, Hanoi's men were the foreign invaders — whatever Americans helped the ARVN forces whether on the ground or through air support were they simply as allies called in by the legitimate Government of the Republic. There are further striking differences between DIEN BIEN PHU and AN LOC. In the earlier battle it was one army ranged against another. At AN LOC the ARVN had to protect more than 40,000 civilians. Yet in contrast to DIEN BIEN PHU, where everybody from De Castries down was infected with a kind of doomed fatalism, morale at AN LOC stayed high throughout its 70 days of agony.

GIVING A LEAD

ARVN officers did not leave the fighting to their men. Almost invariably they fought every savage engagement themselves. General LE VAN HUNG, Commander of AN LOC garrison, took a solemn pledge to die defending the city — boosting not only his men's morale but stiffening the resolve of the civilians.

This latter was of crucial importance. As the French mass-circulation weekly, PARIS MATCH reported, the civilians of AN LOC were so caught up in the spirit of the battle that they formed unofficial assault brigades and on several occasions charged out of the besieged city, destroying at least 14 Soviet T-54 tanks.

It is rather amusing, in view of this, to read snide comments about the ARVN in the world press. Nine-tenths of the military experts and political wiseacres thought the South Vietnam Army would turn tail and run the instant it came up against Hanoi's elite divisions.

The commentators were slow in changing their tune — but change they finally did. For after the counter-attack on QUANG TRI and the heroic defence of AN LOC it became obvious that given half a chance, the South Vietnamese Infantryman could fight as bravely and as stubbornly as any in the world.

As Joseph Alsop wrote in *March of the Nation* on 17th June 1972, « How many American units would have held on as stubbornly and as heroically as the South Vietnamese did at AN LOC ? ».

Alsop, it may be said, was not one of the second guessers. In marked contrast to the majority of American columnists, he had refused to give way to panic when the Communists launched their offensive and had refused to join in the common chorus of disparagement of the ARVN.

PARIS MATCH on July 5, 1972 paid an even more glowing tribute to the defenders of AN LOC when it compared the battle for this town with « a VERDUN or a STALINGRAD in which the South Vietnamese Army proved it could stand on its own feet and that Vietnamisation was not some kind of trick », as had been made out by prejudiced newsmen and politicians.

WISHFUL THINKING

To predict future DIEN BIEN PHU is rather silly ; such predictions have been made so often in the past that nobody can take seriously any more. It is worthwhile, however, to take a close look at certain of the crucial battles in the Vietnam war — battles which everybody assumed were Communist victories until harsh reality finally forced them to swallow their words.

1. In the TET offensive of February 1968, the Reds scored an impressive string of initial victories, even occupied the old imperial capital of HUE for a time. But finally they were pushed out, and the net result of TET was 250,000 Communist troops put out of action and the entire Viet Cong organisation smashed to pieces.

2. In the KHE SANH siege (January 19 to March 31, 1968) 20,000 Communists were killed or wounded. On the allied side losses amounted to less than 200 marines killed.

3. In the battle for LAM SON, in early 1971, 14,000 Communist troops were killed and 170,000 tons of ammunition captured, against an allied toll of 1,146 South Vietnamese dead.

4. The Easter offensive is still in progress, but the Communist thrust has already been badly blunted and it is doubtful they can ever replace the murderous losses that they have suffered.

Figures for the first three months show 50,000 North Vietnamese frontline troops killed, an equivalent number captured or wounded, 11,400 weapons captured, 455 tanks destroyed and 5 tanks captured. Four North Vietnamese Divisions have suffered crippling losses of around 70 per cent of their personnel and have been forced to regroup.

If these battles can be called DIEN BIEN PHU, they are DIEN BIEN PHU for the North Vietnamese and for General VO NGUYEN GIAP — not for either the South Vietnamese or the Americans.

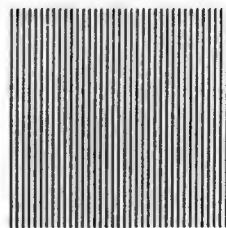
And if there is one lesson that has starkly emerged from the current offensive it is that South Vietnam today is united as it has never been since the French left Indo-China.

There are internal differences, there are grave problems, — but the people have decided to shelve their differences for the time being and to stand behind their government to ensure the survival of their nation's independence.



PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU

AT AN LOC



RVN President NGUYEN VAN THIEU on July 7, 1972, came to AN LOC to observe the battle front and to visit its outstanding defenders. At the Headquarters of Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG, Commander of the 5th Infantry Division, the President promoted a number of combatants to the next higher rank and awarded them from the National Order Medals Third Class with Gallantry Cross with Palm to Military Merit Medals. The President then stated that all combatants fighting in AN LOC were promoted to the next higher rank.

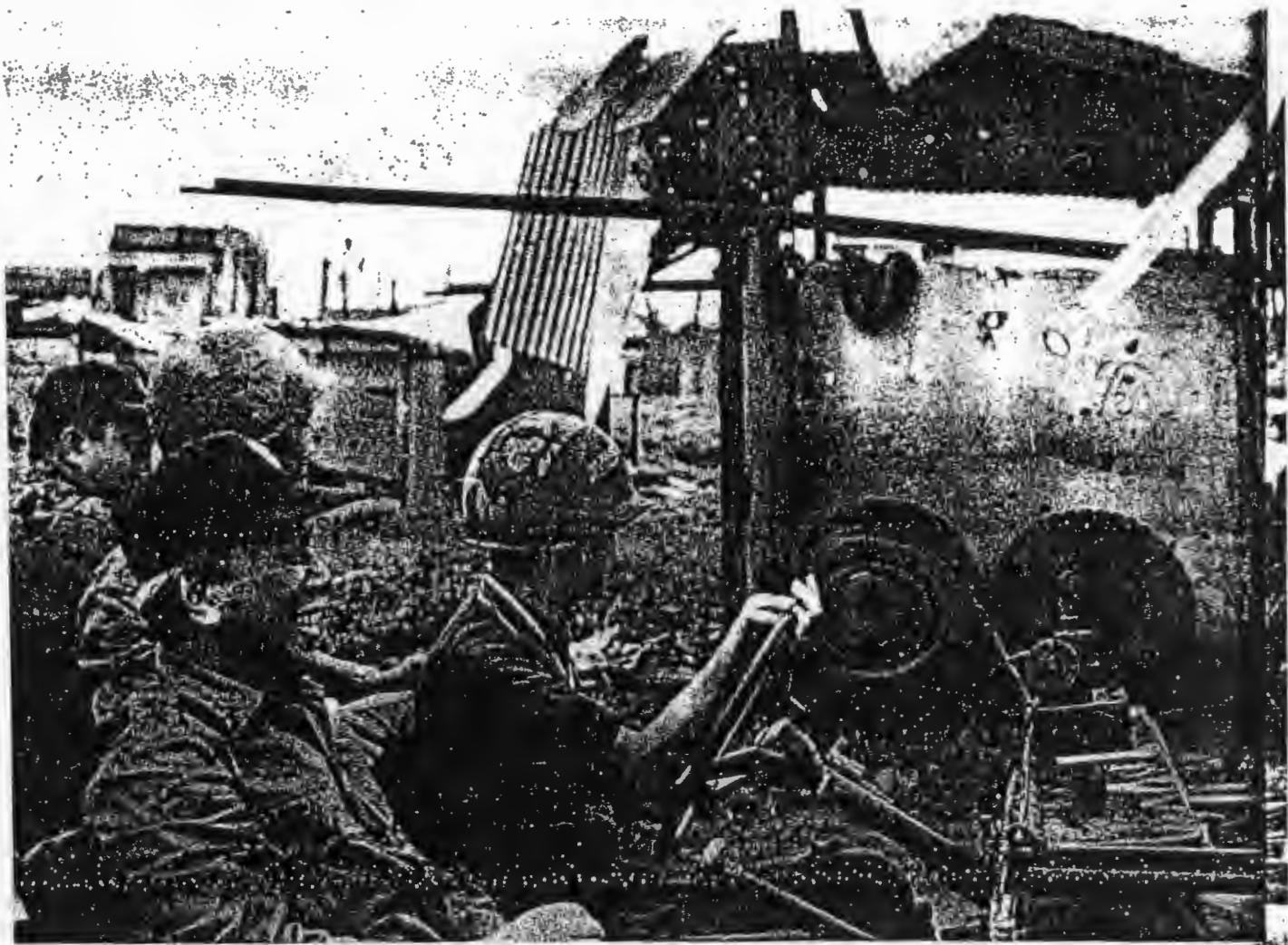
On this occasion, RVN President NGUYEN VAN THIEU said that he came to AN LOC to visit and pay tribute to all the combatants who had been valiantly fighting for the past three months. He was very proud of their noble sacrifices and endurance that brought the nation's victory over communist theories of revolutionary, liberation and people war. AN LOC victory was not only that of the RVN Armed Forces over three enemy's divisions, but also a victory of the free world's democracy over the Communist totalitarianism. It spoke out clearly the gallant fighting spirit, capability and determination of the South Vietnamese people to fight against the Communist invaders to safeguard the beloved fatherland and to preserve the free and democratic way of life.

The President later walked along the streets to meet other combatants and civilians. He observed Communists' tanks destroyed, hospital, school, temple, church, houses etc... ruined by enemy shellings and fires, and visited the soldier graveyard.





After being awarded the National Order Medal Third Class with Gallantry Cross with Palm, Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG walking with the RVN President NGUYỄN VĂN THIỆU for a seeing tour of some Russian made tanks destroyed, weapons captured, ruined houses etc.



... and driving him to inspect defensive outposts in Northern part of AN LOC.





RVN President NGUYEN VAN THIEU chatting with and comforting civilians in his observation tour to AN LOC on July 7, 1972.



COMMUNIST NORTH VIETNAM'S DEFEAT SIGHTED

T

ODAY, after nearly three months of the so-called final phase of their invasion of South Viet-Nam, the Communists have to acknowledge that they had miscalculated and that they cannot achieve their aims.

« Their miscalculation stems from their basic strategy as well as their tactics, from their psychological, political and military considerations.

« They will fail as they failed in the Mậu Thân Offensive (1968).

« They fail because they have no just cause; therefore, they are not welcomed by the people of South Viet-Nam, on the contrary, the people of South Viet-Nam just run away from them. For that reason, despite their general military offensive, they cannot incite the people to a General Uprising as they often claimed.

« They fail because, although their military forces remain strong, they no longer have their infrastructure in the villages and hamlets and they cannot cause political disturbances in our towns.

« They fail because, forced to fight a modern conventional war, they only have a strong land force, without a navy or air force to support accordingly.

« They fail because their expeditionary forces are too large and their logistics are sparse, coming from a far-distant rear, on roads studded with obstacles, and at the present time crippled at their very sources.

« They fail because their men have low morale, they are disgusted, while still having to face the Armed Forces of the Republic of Viet-Nam which is strongly supported by the people of South Viet-Nam and their allies.

• After three months, the Communists are bogged down.

• The more divisions they infiltrate into South Viet-Nam, the bigger their difficulties are to supply them with military uniforms and equipment. If they refuse to leave South Viet-Nam then they will have to accept self-destruction to the last man.

• They have bogged down because they opened too many fronts thinking that it would spread thin our forces and make them more vulnerable. In fact they have stretched thin their own forces.

• As a result, they have achieved no general military victory which would determine the political question as they had hoped.

• I consider this a desperate phase, a risky action in the hope to salvage what is left of the war of aggression which the bellicose leaders in North Viet-Nam themselves have for many years known that it would fail....

• To date, the Communists must have realized that they have failed in their expectations from the points of view of time and space because our Army has not been destroyed. On the contrary, most of their own regular forces are weakened and are being decimated.

• Neither have the Communists been able to disturb substantially our Pacification and Development Program.

• In the places temporarily lost to them, the Communists are unable to contain our attacks. Furthermore, these places lie within our reach for total liberation.

• It is only a matter of time, and the delay will also be short.

• KONTUM and BINH LONG hold on victoriously. Then QUANG TRI can be recaptured.

• The Communists must be aware of this and be concerned because they have faced a brave BINH LONG, a tough KONTUM, and TRI-THIEN waiting for the uprising.

• The Communists cannot win with a rear in North Viet-Nam heavily bombed and tightly blockaded, with an expeditionary army lacking food, medicine, lacking also in morale, to the extent that the men must be chained to their armored cars, to the trees, to their anti-aircraft guns, their mortars, — chained individually, or in groups of two or three, and even drugged before each battle, looking no less like inanimate instruments.

« Let the Communists not believe that they can disintegrate the morale of the South Viet-Nam people and Army with their crimes and rockets, by firing their machine-guns at patients as they did at the QUANG TRI civilian hospital, by gunning wantonly into a church, by herding children and adults into a school and then calling artillery upon them as they did at AN LOC.

« Neither can the Communists win when the people in South Viet-Nam cannot forget the innocent women and children buried alive by the thousands by the Communists in THUA THIEN during the 1968 Mau-Than Tet offensive, and other innumerable crimes committed in the past quarter of this century...

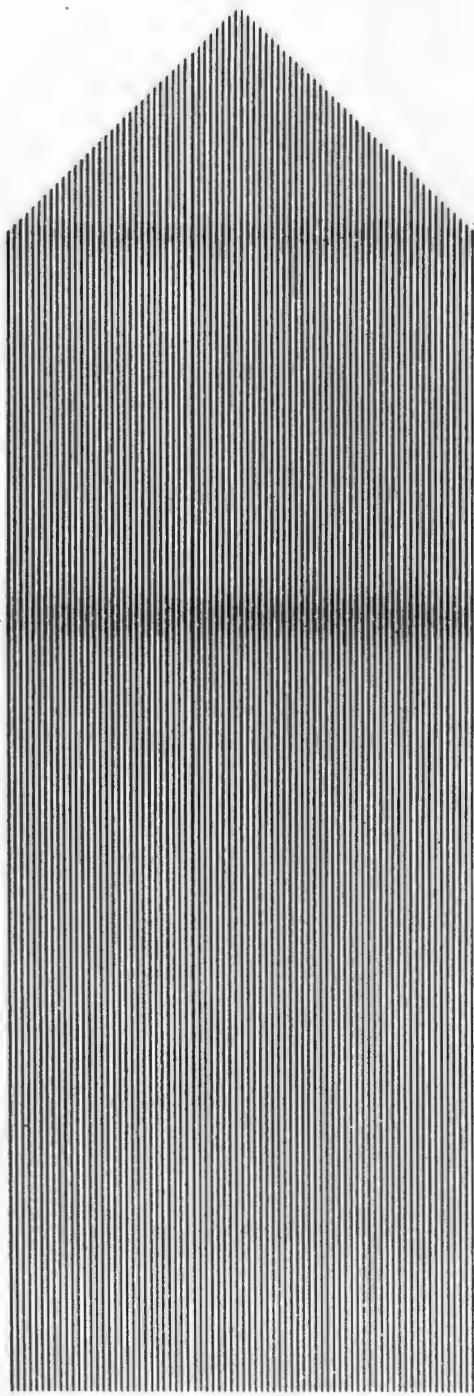
« Although BINH LONG and KONTUM are, for the moment, only an illustration of the failure of the bellicose North Viet-Nam leaders, they also are the beginning of the final and lasting failure of those blood-thirsty aggressors.

« BINH LONG and KONTUM are the symbols of the indomitable spirit and the determination to win of the South Viet-Nam people and Army.

« BINH LONG and KONTUM are the pride of the South Viet-Nam people and Army courageously defending themselves against the savage aggressors.

« With the BINH LONG and KONTUM spirit, we must defeat and will defeat the Communists »...

Excerpts from the ORDER OF THE DAY
of the PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM
to the ARMED FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM
on ARMED FORCES DAY — June 19, 1972.





President NGUYEN VAN THIEU (with cap bearing the presidential insignia) smiling among the heroic defenders of AN LOC.



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