

VC HIT SAIGON

Reds Invade Embassy, Air Base

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SAIGON (UPI)—Viet Cong forces launched heavy attacks against Saigon Wednesday. Guerrillas fought their way into the U.S. Embassy and occupied five floors of it for several hours.

Other Reds invaded Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport and battled American and Vietnamese troops and tanks.

American military policemen fought around the gleaming, new embassy for more than four hours. Helicopters dropped troops onto a roof-top pad to help rout the Communist suicide squad.

Radio reports from the embassy reported at 9:15 a.m. that it was secure and said 19 Viet Cong had been killed inside.

American casualties were reported as eight dead with an unknown number wounded.

Another 21 U.S. military police were killed while defending the military billets.

A U.S. spokesman said Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker was not in the embassy when it was attacked.

"There were no senior officials in there," the spokesman said.

The Communists bombed at least four American military hotels in Saigon and struck Independence Palace, the office of President Nguyen Van Thieu, with rockets and mortars in a pre-dawn raid. There was fighting in the streets near the palace.

The headquarters of the South Vietnamese military also came under ground attack.

The attacks were the most audacious of the new Communist offensive which erupted in eight cities Tuesday.

The attacks in Saigon began shortly before midnight. One of the American billets was reported still under heavy attack at mid-morning.

The Communist force fought defenders on three sides of Tan Son Nhut and then battled their way inside the barbed wire.

The military police made several assaults against the Embassy but the Viet Cong threw grenades and drove them back.

Saigon Radio also was attacked. A U.S. tank that came to rescue it was knocked out. But at mid-morning it broadcast a curfew announcement by Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky.

Viet Cong terrorists stole an American jeep with a .50-caliber machine gun mounted on the
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U.S. Embassy, Air Base

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back and drove it through the streets.

Viet Cong forces also invaded the residence of one of Bunker's assistants, Col. George Jacobson, mission coordinator, and occupied the bottom floor for several hours while Jacobson holed up in the floor above.

MPs finally charged the residence, next to the Embassy and routed the Viet Cong.

The attacks were part of the largest terror offensive yet launched by the Communists. The Reds ushered in the Lunar

SAIGON (S&S)—Pacific Stars and Stripes Vietnam Bureau, in a late report from Saigon, listed these developments:

—A demolition team was disarming two mortar rounds fired into MACV headquarters near Tan Son Nhut Airport.

—An MP machine-gun patrol jeep was blown up in Saigon, killing two military policemen.

—The Viet Cong set up a machine gun in front of a bowling alley and opened fire. Vietnamese tanks were heading for the scene.

New Year early Tuesday with attacks against eight major cities, at least three American airfields and some 20 to 30 towns and military positions throughout the country.

Early Wednesday they were at it again.

Military spokesman said the huge Marine helicopter park at Da Nang's Marble Mountain was hit with rockets early Wednesday for the second day.

Can Tho, a key government city in the Mekong Delta and headquarters of the IV Corps Region was attacked.

At Kontum, the Military Assistance Command headquarters was under heavy attack early Wednesday. Fighting also was reported in Ban Man Thuot and light action at Pleiku.

(The U.S. helicopter assault on the Embassy began about 8:35 a.m., with the choppers swooping in over downtown Saigon rooftops to unload troops, AP said.

(By 8:55 a.m., the U.S. forces had secured the grounds of the Embassy and troops were working their way through the building to flush out remaining Viet Cong.

(By that time, 17 Viet Cong bodies had been counted in the Embassy grounds.

(Other Viet Cong were known to be in the basement of the building and possibly on other floors. They also were in a two-story building behind the Embassy, and gunfire was coming from both buildings.

(The white embassy building, opened only last November, was badly shot up and the Great Seal of the United States was knocked by bullets from the wall above the entrance.

(The body of one Vietnamese Embassy employe was found on

the grounds. In the street in front was a black sedan that had been shot up when it failed to halt. The driver was believed to have been mortally wounded.)

On Tuesday, the Communists quickly ended a planned 36-hour holiday truce when they attacked seven provincial capitals and the city of Da Nang, *Pacific Stars & Stripes* Vietnam Bureau reported.

The U.S. command acknowledged "full scale" attacks on Kontum, Ban Me Thuot, Nha Trang, Hoi An, Tuy Hoa, Qui Nhon and Pleiku. Ton Canh, a village in the Dak To area, was reported burned.

The attack on Kontum cost the enemy 139 dead while the defenders lost 9 dead and 50 wounded.

At Ban Me Thout, A Vietnamese Army regiment reported finding 150 Communist bodies. The Vietnamese reported 20 friendly troops killed and 46 wounded.

Fighting was reported in the streets and a Viet Cong group was holding out in Nha Trang late Tuesday afternoon. The city is the site of I Field Force headquarters, which controls all U.S. forces in the II Corps zone.

Sources said 32 Reds had been killed in Nha Trang.

At Da Nang, six planes were destroyed and one Marine killed in a rocket attack on the U.S. air base. In the city itself, reports said 64 enemy soldiers were killed and 231 suspects detained. A Red squad reportedly penetrated I Corps headquarters in the city before being driven off.

At Qui Nhon, an estimated two platoons of Reds were reported to have occupied a radio station and maintenance building. The Reds were reported to be dug in but surrounded by nightfall.

At least 28 Reds were reported killed in Qui Nhon.