

Cling To Bunker

# Guns, Napalm Fail To Dislodge Reds

SAGION (AP) — North Vietnamese troops clung stubbornly to their bunker positions south of Da Nang early Friday despite a pounding by U.S. artillery, napalm and the fire of American infantrymen. Sporadic action was reported continuing.

Spokesmen of the Americal Division reported ground units still had not reached a crashed command helicopter that was shot down last Tuesday with seven Army men and Associated Press photographer Oliver Noonan aboard. They were reported encountering heavy resistance.

Ten 122mm rockets hit the U.S. air base in Da Nang shortly after midnight, but spokesmen said casualties and damage were light. Most of the ground fighting was centered in the northern provinces and around Da Nang, the U.S. Command said, but two attacks were reported closer to Saigon. About 70 miles north Saigon, a U.S. Army convoy was hit Thursday while moving along Highway 13. Mechanized infantry troops escorting the convoy fought back and reported killing 11 enemy with the help of helicopter gunships. Four Americans were wounded.

Only 13 miles northwest of the capital, an element of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division came under mortar and automatic weapons fire shortly after midnight. The attack was beaten back, but the Americans lost two men killed and 12 wounded, spokesmen said.

Heavy casualties were reported Thursday in the battle 31 miles south of Da Nang.

Reports from the field said 1,000-1,500 North Vietnamese regulars appeared determined to make a stand against more than 1,200 allied troops in the biggest battle since the Communist command opened its fall campaign last week.

Late in the day, U.S. officers reported upward of 400 North Vietnamese had been killed since the fighting broke out Sunday, 121 of them in Thursday's fighting. They gave U.S. casualties as at least 27 killed and 150 wounded.

The battle reopened as three companies from the U.S. American Division's 196th Light Infantry Brigade set out through the underbrush toward a command helicopter shot down Tuesday with eight men aboard.

They ran into enemy bunkers with interlocking fields of fire in an area called the Rice Bowl, about five miles east of the district and refugee center town of Hiep Duc.

U.S. artillery poured hundreds of rounds into the area, and U.S. fighter-bombers attacked with high explosives and flaming napalm.

But enemy anti-aircraft guns kept up intensive fire against helicopters shuttling in and out of the battle, riddling several.

About 300 South Vietnamese troops were sent into the Rice Bowl and immediately were caught up in the fighting. Two U.S. Marine companies of about 150 men each were dispatched to an area a few miles to the north to ease the pressure on army units.

By late afternoon, the three U.S. companies still were about three-quarters of a mile from the scene of the helicopter crash, which apparently killed a battalion commander, six other Army men and Associated Press photographer Oliver Noonan, 29. They officially are listed as missing.

U.S. officers believe the battle was touched off because the North Vietnamese were maneuvering for a major attack on Hiep Duc and its refugee camps. The North Vietnamese bumped into two U.S. companies Sunday and the battle was on.

The only other major fighting reported was 45 miles northwest of Saigon, where North Vietnamese attempting to ambush a U.S. armored column touched off an American flare Wednesday night.

The ensuing battle carried on into the morning hours. Field reports listed 32 North Vietnamese killed. Six Americans were wounded and two armored personnel carriers were damaged.

The rising pace of battle since the enemy kicked off a fall campaign Aug. 12 was reflected in a sharp increase of U.S., South Vietnamese and enemy casualties last week.

The U.S. Command said 244 Americans were killed and 1,409 wounded, compared with 96 killed and 489 wounded the week before.

Allied forces reported 3,798 enemy killed last week, compared with 2,360 the previous week. South Vietnamese casualties were 477 killed and 1,269 wounded, up from 225 killed and 687 wounded the week before.

The American battle deaths were the highest since the week ended June 21, when 247 were killed.

The week's losses raised American casualties to 37,938 killed and 245,729 wounded since Jan. 1, 1961. In that period, allied forces claim to have killed 541,427 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.