

# Vietnamese Kill 44 In Battle, Lose Almost As Many Soldiers

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SAIGON (UPI)—In what military communiques reported to be the heaviest battle in Vietnam Wednesday, a South Vietnamese infantry company killed 44 Communist soldiers in the Mekong Delta marshlands but lost almost an equal number of men itself.

The sharp fighting near Phuoc Loc, deep in the delta and 124 miles southwest of Saigon, cost the South Vietnamese "heavy" casualties. The heavy casualties reported by South Vietnamese spokesmen meant that more than one-third of the company's personnel were either killed or wounded. The company had more than 100 men.

Spokesmen said the South Vietnamese regional force contacted Communist troops while conducting a combat sweep in marshy Bac Lieu province. As the battle began, the government soldiers were backed by helicopter gunships firing rockets and machine guns.

Near the embattled Que Son valley, U.S. B52 bombers Wednesday scored a direct hit on a North Vietnamese division headquarters, killing 160 men in

a blow that helped cripple a 3,000-man North Vietnamese unit, spokesmen said. Another 35 Communists were killed by Allied forces fighting to protect three wounded Americans near a downed helicopter in a jungle clearing northeast of Saigon.

In Saigon, U.S. spokesmen reported two new significant incidents in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) which divides the two Vietnams. In delayed reports, the spokesmen said American fighter-bombers hit the buffer strip Tuesday, while U.S. naval gunfire pounded the zone Monday.

The planes attacked a Communist bunker complex seven miles north of the U.S. Marine outpost at the Rockpile and one-half mile inside the DMZ after North Vietnamese troops fired on an American observation plane in which a crew member was wounded.

Naval gunfire was directed into the DMZ after lights were spotted a little over a mile north of the DMZ's southern edge. The gunfire set off 25 secondary explosions.

In the heaviest fighting involving American troops, three men of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division were killed and two wounded in a battle with Communist troops in a bunker complex about 30 miles northwest of Saigon.

pickup 3rd pgh 213a: U.S. Army U.S. Army operations reports said the B52 dropped about 90 tons of explosives on the jungle headquarters of the North Vietnamese 2nd Army Division 340 miles northeast of Saigon.

Top ranking officers said the raid ripped apart scores of steel-reinforced bunkers in the jungle command post and helped cripple the division. Military sources said the 3,000-man division was being pulled out of the Que Son Valley area Wednesday.

Disclosure of the B52 raid — made last week but only reported Wednesday — came as the U.S. Command completed the withdrawal of the last of 25,000 American troops ordered back home by President Nixon.

The last units to leave were members of a 250-man Marine Corps fighter attack squadron which went to Japan and about 300 members of three small units of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division flown from Bien Hoa Air Base to Hawaii.

For the first time in 10 days

Wednesday there were no reports of heavy fighting in the 10-mile-long Que Son Valley.

Military sources said the deadly B52 strike against the North Vietnamese headquarters has not yet been officially announced by the U.S. Command because American troops were unable to penetrate the Communist-dominated jungles to verify the results.

They said, however, that seven North Vietnamese prisoners who had been runners between the division headquarters and a regimental outpost confirmed the 160 dead in separate interrogations.