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Allies Try To Set Up Cong Trap

SAIGON (AP) — Reinforced U.S. and South Vietnamese troops surrounded a valley south of Da Nang Saturday, hoping to trap part of a North Vietnamese division that has been slugging it out with allied forces for two weeks.

The allies expected to find elements of two regiments of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division in the Que Son Valley some 30 miles south of Da Nang, but contact was so light it was believed most enemy troops may have escaped.

The allied forces, swelled to 3,000 with the reinforcement of a U.S. Marine battalion and a South Vietnamese battalion, launched a sweep from four sides along the jungled ridges around the valley near the refugee center of Hiep Duc.

At first, the major target was a 1,270-foot peak called Deo Ram, in the adjoining Hiep Duc Valley just to the south of Que Son Valley. But U.S. Marines found only light opposition on the hill, which had been stoutly defended the day before.

So the hunt was pressed in the Que Son Valley area, hoping that the North Vietnamese would be found among the rice paddies in the valley and along the slopes of the surrounding hills.

As of Saturday, U.S. Army and Marines had claimed about 1,000 enemy killed since Aug. 12, when infantrymen made the first contact in what developed into one of the biggest battles of the year.

U.S. losses since major fighting began Aug. 17 are estimated at 75 killed and 328 wounded. Ranking officers said U.S. Marines have lost 38 killed and 180 wounded since they joined the battle Aug. 23.

At first, U.S. officers thought the North Vietnamese were preparing to attack Hiep Duc. Now they believe the enemy aim either was to inflict casualties or to lure defenders away from pacified areas south of Da Nang.

U.S. officers said one of the North Vietnamese division's regiments, the 3rd, has suffered nearly 80 per cent casualties. The division's 2nd Regiment is in better condition, but now it appears in disarray and trying to get away, they added. The 2nd Regiment was the main target of the allied trap. It is called a Viet Cong regiment but 95 per cent of it is believed to be made up of North Vietnamese.

From various intelligence reports, including information from defectors and prisoners, Marine officers said they learned of the whereabouts of the regiment.

The two battalions of Marines and South Vietnamese troops were airlifted into the hills overlooking the Que Son Valley Saturday after a reinforced Marine reconnaissance team secured the previously abandoned mountaintop fire support base, Ryder at about dusk Friday.