

Red Shelling Sparks Battle Inside DMZ

SAIGON, March 16 (AP)—The U.S. Command Sunday reported sharp fighting inside the Demilitarized Zone for the first time in nearly four months. Just south of the DMZ, enemy troops ambushed and virtually wiped out a 35-man U.S.-South Vietnamese patrol.

Elsewhere there were 50 overnight rocket and mortar attacks on allied bases and towns across the country, including Saigon, as the Communist offensive entered its fourth week. Allied spokesmen said over-all military casualties and damage were light.

[Over Sunday night, enemy gunners shelled 20 allied bases and towns, but no major towns were hit, spokesmen said Monday.]

The battle in the DMZ, which took place Saturday, was the first reported in the Zone since Nov. 26, but it was the eighth clash involving North Vietnamese forces near the northern frontier in the past 22 days.

The United States has repeatedly accused North Vietnam of abusing the DMZ to attack allied bases and patrols to the south, thus violating what Washington considers part of a tacit agreement that led to the bombing halt.

Another part of the reported agreement was that the Communists should not attack South Vietnam's large cities. President Nixon, reacting to Communist shellings of Saigon and other populated areas, has said there will be an "appropriate response" if the attacks continue.

Delayed accounts reaching Saigon said U.S. Marines and an armored column, supported by the destroyer Mullinnix, invaded the southern half of the eastern DMZ Saturday after North Vietnamese troops fired 15 rockets from inside the Zone on two American supply bases.

U.S. headquarters said at least 10 North Vietnamese soldiers were killed and two captured in the 4½-hour fight. No American casualties or damage were reported either in the ground fighting or the rocket attacks.

But one Vietnamese civilian was killed and six were wounded when several of the rockets fell in a nearby village.

Spokesmen said about 150 enemy troops ambushed the 35-man Combined Action Platoon, of which 13 to 16 were U.S. Marines and the rest South Vietnamese militiamen.

See VIETNAM, A18, Col. 1

U.S. Marines Fight Enemy Inside DMZ

After Rocket Salvo

HANOI, Vietnam, From A Tokyo radio statement broadcast by the (North) Vietnamese Agency, also charged U.S. bombing attacks Saturday in Quangbinh Province, the area of the Mugia Pass, through which North Vietnam moves and supplies into Laos [The U.S. Command also disclosed that five American helicopters were shot down and destroyed by enemy gunfire Friday and Saturday, and that three of them in Chuongthien province deep in the Mekong Delta. Three Americans were killed and six wounded in the clashes.]

The main enemy force drew toward the DMZ after Friday and Saturday, cutting up the allied platoons with machine-gun and small arms fire. But, as the outnumbered Marines and militiamen retreated to their base camps, they were attacked again by another enemy force. Four village officials were caught in the crossfire and killed the second attack.

The fighting inside the DMZ was touched off when enemy gunners fired Russian-made 122-mm. and 140-mm. rockets at Navy supply depots at a point about five miles below the DMZ.

U.S. spokesmen admitted a Marine reconnaissance patrol was inside the southern edge of the DMZ before the shelling, one of many patrols that have been moving in and out of the DMZ since the bombing of North Vietnam was halted Nov. 1.

"From time to time we conduct reconnaissance into the southern half of the DMZ," said a spokesman.

"The Marines moved to investigate and engage an unknown size North Vietnamese army force before reaching the firing site, about three miles northeast of Giolinh and about one mile inside the Zone," the U.S. communique said.

The small Marine patrol radioed for help and amphibious vehicles armed with heavy machine guns moved into the area from positions south of the DMZ.

[North Vietnam's Foreign Minister Sunday accused the United States of a tank-supported infantry raid in the DMZ Saturday, news agencies reported from Hong Kong and

Ho Hails Offensive As a Big Victory

TOKYO, March 16 (UPI)—North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh today hailed the Communists' offensive in South Vietnam as a big victory and said they should press on until the nation is liberated.

The statement was in a radio message to Nguyen Huu Tho, chairman of the National Liberation Front (Vietcong). "The U.S. aggressors have lost heavily, but they have not given up their aggressive design and do not want to withdraw their troops from our country," Ho said. "We must continue to fight till the U.S. and its puppets are completely defeated . . ."