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offensive 1 (normass/deepe)

BIEN HOA, SOUTH VIETNAM, SEPTEMBER 4--The Communist third offensive into Vietnam's major cities is already unraveling in slow-motion. The battle for Saigon is now in progress—but is being fought miles outside the capital. Thus far, the Communists are suffering severe casualties and substantial tactical defeats in the ground war.

Some Communist big-unit formations are already in a slow-motion march towards the capital and other major cities. Other big-unit "hard-hat" units are already in position close to Saigon. Saigon. Communist Terrorist, sabotage and ~~fx~~ commando units are already in Saigon or are continuing to infiltrate into the capital at an unknown rate.

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offensive 2 (normass/deepe)

^{this}
This is the view of American field officers at the ~~third~~ Third Corps headquarters—commanding the eleven provinces around Saigon—~~situated 18~~ situated 18 miles north of Saigon.

The view that the Communist third-offensive is underway is not necessarily the the top-level official assessment of the ~~countryw-~~ countrywide situation. Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu has stated that Communist acceleration of military activity since August 18 is not the third offensive—because "it is not strong enough." The American official command is also reluctant to ~~qualify~~ define past developments as the third offensive for the same ~~reasons~~ reason. "If this is the third offensive, the Communists have lost the war," one low-level ~~officer~~ ^{officers at the} American officer explained. ^{Believe those} ~~The~~ Vietnamese ^{are} ~~high~~ government's high command ~~quality~~ qualify military developments of the first of a ~~two-~~ two-phase offensive, the first phase running from August 15 to September 15 and marked by flanking attacks outside the cities, the second phase running from September 15 ~~onward~~ onwards, marked by continuous fighting in the urban centers.

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Significantly, the Viet /c Cong radio broadcasts ~~seem to agree~~ with American field commanders here—that the offensive ~~has begun~~.

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offensive ³2 (normass/deepe)

The most tentative thumbnail assessment of what has happened during the first two weeks of the Communist offensive is this: The Allies are succeeding in interdicting and defeating the Communist big-unit formations in battle--but the Allies are unable to seal and totally secure the major cities from infiltration of small-unit terrorist, sniper, sapper and commando units. The sources are confident the "Communist big-unit hammer blow into Saigon will turn into a little tap," but they are clearly worried about continuous, low-level fighting and terrorism in the cities. "Man, if the Communists turn 2000 snipers loose in Saigon, shooting the Vietnamese citizens, I don't know what would happen. But, instead, the Communists will send their regiments hammering in--and they'll be cut down. But little units will slip in."

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offensive 4 (normass/deepe)

In fact, none of the Allied sources in Saigon seem prepared to guess how much residual strength the Communists have had in the capital for some time, how many fifth-columnists, terrorists, political cadre or weapons caches have been in Saigon for ^{months.} ~~some time~~. However, ~~the~~ a *VAQUE* shadowy Communist presence is being felt in the capital.

At the tactical def

The strategic ~~def~~ defense of Saigon is organized in three, ever-widening circles ~~Exp~~ expanding from the center, with the greatest concentration of Allied forces in the second circle from where the Communist set up their rocket positions to harrass the city. Beyond these three circles, ~~the~~ ~~reaching~~ reaching near the Cambodian border—the Allies rely mainly on ~~reconnaissance reconnaissance~~ reconnaissance missions for spotting the Communists, and then calling in air and artillery to smash them.

During the past week, Communist big-unit ^{*live*} formations have moved through the outer defense screen, more than twenty miles from the city. One principal evidence of this was the three-day battle last week between the U. S. Army 101st Airborne and the North Vietnamese 101st Regiment. Americans ~~carried~~ claimed a body count of 103 North Vietnamese, many of whom became trapped in an encirclement by heliborne American troops. The battle took place at ~~Tran~~ Trang Bang, which lies astride a major Communist infiltration route—and where another battle took place during the May offensive.

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offensive 5 (normass/deepe)

"The Communists are just following the same pattern as in May," one informed source explained. "They are rolling in from the border areas. They have pushed through our outer defense screen. Pretty soon we'll see more action closer and closer to Saigon. We can just keep following their movements through the second layer of our defense system. * They use the ~~pile-on~~ pile-on-theory just to keep pushing their troops along *towards Saigon.*"

The three Communist divisions in the area ~~are~~ are the 5th, 7th and 9th. Elements of the 7th Division are reported to be moving down the Song Be river, ~~area,~~ into the wooded ~~catchers-mitt~~ "catchers-mitt" area, ^{30 miles} *with the Allies* north of Saigon. • The 9th division, division has broken contact after participating in the Tay Na Ninh actions beginning August 18. That unit is considered to be have withdrawn into Cambodia, where they ~~will~~ *will* go further south, then cut into the narrow "parrot's beak" area, only ~~miles~~ miles directly west of Saigon. The 5th Division is still active in Tay Ninh province near the Cambodian border, where they engage American units and armor convoys on a harassing basis.

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offensive 6 (normass/deepe)

The "function in life" of these three main divisions during the major thrust of the expected escalation of activity in the cities will be to tie down American and Vietnamese divisions to prevent ~~the~~ their reinforcing Saigon. These Communist divisions are mainly North Vietnamese in troop ~~strength and command~~ strength.

Closer into Saigon, in the second layer of defense, three Communist ~~autonomous~~ autonomous regiments, more Southern in composition, are also considered ~~strong~~ to be moving towards the city, or are already in a good enough position to springboard into the city. These autonomous regiments—called the Dong Nai, Cuu Long 2 and Quyet Thang—are generally north of Saigon city and are only a good night's march away from major airports and military installations in the area. Other Communists battalions to the southern part of the city are ~~be~~ considered to be attempting to ~~not~~ move north—but have had difficulty in ^{PIERCING} moving through the battalions of the U. S. Army 9th Division, which has engaged a number of them.

These units, called "regional" or "provincial" battalions, are composed more of "local boys" who know the terrain; "The ~~as~~ Communists can't gain many points sending North Vietnamese divisions into Saigon," one source explained. These units are expected to bear the brunt of the Saigon fighting.

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offensive 7 (normass/deepe)

"We expect the Communists to try a prolonged offensive of the May-type," one informed source explained. "They'll try to stick one battalion into one region of Saigon or its fringes, order it to hold until it is completely chewed up, and then they will send in another battalion to do the same thing. They'll try to keep continuous pressure on the city--maybe for four or five ~~week~~ weeks--while using rockets and terrorists to give the world ~~of~~ the impression of greater strength than they actually have."

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