

A Red Attack the Viets Had to Admire

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TAN BUU, Viet Nam.

Only 10 miles from Saigon's gleaming white Presidential Palace, a Viet Cong Communist unit momentarily adopted Korean War-style tactics of a miniature invasion instead of following their usual elusive guerrilla tactics.

The Viet Cong unit, part of a 500-man reinforced battalion scampered over rice-paddy dikes only 500 feet from the small outpost, dug dozens of foxholes and set up captured, American-made .57-millimeter recoilless rifles and .75-millimeter Chinese Communist recoilless rifles.

A government local militia squad, seeing the Viet Cong moving across the fields, fled into the outpost—a landowner's old French-style villa—only minutes before a pre-dawn onslaught of shelling, which tore great gaps in two barbed-wire fences, ripped through a concrete wall and smashed the villa's front door.

Minutes later, the Viet Cong troops advanced through

the gaps, sending the defenders "retreating in blood," as one of them described it.

An American officer was killed near a foxhole not far from the front gate, after expending four boxes of machine-gun ammunition to delay the Viet Cong advance. An American sergeant, one of the 20 wounded, escaped by jumping into the river and hiding until the Viet Cong retreated two hours later.

Simultaneously, other elements of the Viet Cong reinforced battalion launched three other, diversionary attacks. More than 100 Viet Cong attacked another hamlet north of Tan Buu. Others harassed with mortar fire two outposts to the south and fired 25 .81-mm. mortar shells into an artillery position in the neighboring Binh Chann district headquarters.

One round crashed through the roof of the district headquarters, and one exploded outside police headquarters, where 10 district police officials barely escaped injury. Several landed only 20 yards from the hut of a five-man American district advisory team.

The operation, little over a week ago, was "a very bold, very well-co-ordinated plan," an American field adviser said. "You can't help but admire it."

Before retreating from Tan Buu, the Viet Cong stole all the weapons from the armory (an unknown number), carried away so much ammunition they could not paddle it all down the river, and even swiped the Vietnamese company commander's boots and uniforms.

They captured four heavy weapons and enough rifles to equip a new company; three American-supplied radios, which enables them to listen to radio communications of government forces; classified documents, and even a government trooper's hammock.

While porters loaded the loot on river rafts and paddled off, other members of the Red battalion beat on the doors of the villagers. "But we were too terrified to open the door," the village barber said.

"The Viet Cong now has the same weapons that we have," an American adviser lamented after the attack. "It appears we are equipping both sides."