

CAO Anh.

BINH HANG TRUNG--South Viet Nam--The massive three-day operation in the ~~treacherous~~ Plain of Reeds ~~has netted~~ ^{Concluded today with} the killing of 84 Communist Viet Cong and capturing ²⁵ ~~seven~~, according to Vietnamese military sources.

Seven V.C. suspects were also captured, along with small quantities of ammunition and a hand-made rifle manufactured from plumber's pipe, according to ^{col} Huynh Van Cao, commander of the 7th Inf. Division, Army of Viet Nam.

No enemy bases or installations were seized in the heavily VC infested area.

The large-scale operation, which concluded Wednesday at 5 p.m., was one of the most extensive in the five-province tactical region since last July and the largest ever ^{Conducted} ~~contacted~~ against the Viet Cong in ~~crucial~~ Kien Phong Province, brushing the Cambodian border.

Col. Cao said ^{more than} ~~about~~ 3000 Vietnamese land, air and naval forces were ~~directly~~ involved in the operation. However, other key military leaders placed the total troop involvement at ~~8,000-8,800~~ ^{8,000}, including indirect support from Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps--the local militia of the provinces and villages.

Col. Cao said 80 of the 84 VC deaths resulted from an ^{Strike} ~~airstrike~~ of two AD-6's fighter planes on Monday--the first day of the campaign. His information was based, he said, on air reconnaissance mission, though no ~~an~~ actual headcount was made. Intelligence information gather ^{ED} from prisoners indicated ~~and~~ estimated 40 VC had been killed by the combined fighter plane and heavy artillery barrage.

~~On~~ Army of Vietnam forces suffered five injuries. ~~Two~~ men were wounded when they were attacked ~~by~~ by water & buffaloes and three when they stepped on ~~an~~ an explosive booby trap. ^{Three were evacuated by B-34 Helicopter to Saigon.}

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Seven of the nine battalions of the 7th Div--reinforced with heavy artillery, naval, and air support and local militia--tightened their encirclement operation to an area six miles in diameter. They began Monday by moving ~~z~~ into Kien Phong Province across a 400 sq. mile (questioned by Saigon AP--Tony Escoda) of the Plain of Reeds south of the "eagle's beak" of the Cambodian border. However, only slight contact was made with the VC.

ARVN forces were directly supported by three provisional battalions of Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, indirectly assisted by local militia already manning outposts in the area and providing security in provinces left unguarded by regular Army troops. Fifteen light naval crafts provided blocking and troop transport on the Thap Moui Canal on the northern boundary of the operation.

One airborne battalion alerted in Saigon was not used in the operation.

Despite the relatively small number of enemy losses, Col. Cao said he considered the operation a success.

"We are able to know whether the VC are in this area or not," he said. "We get contact with the people on a big operation like this. ~~By~~ Guerrilla activities and the political structure of the VC are broken down."

This is the ninth operation since Mid-February in which the main fighting force of the 7th Inf. Division was involved.

Civil and social action teams will move into the area swept free of VC in an effort to stabilize the area and keep out the enemy, Col. Cao said.

Asked how long the VC would stay out of the area once regular Army troops were removed, Col. Cao said, "It depends on the local forces patrolling the area and setting up nightly ambushes. Guerrilla activity is difficult to rebuild."

30

Transmitted by Telephon at 5:45; April 4, 1962 to Tony Escoda. Line was clear.