

Big Cong HQ Captured After Foe Has Fled

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HO BO WOODS,

South Viet Nam.

American infantrymen yesterday seized—without firing a shot—a vacant Viet Cong regimental-sized headquarters complex during one of the largest operations yet staged near Saigon.

In the jungled Viet Cong base camp, situated 40 miles northwest of Saigon, elements of the United States Army 1st Infantry Division found Chinese Communist flags, 2,000 rounds of Chinese-manufactured ammunition, a hospital, two dining halls—equipped with fragile china-ware—bicycles and clothes.

On the wall of the camp, a Viet Cong cadre had marked off the days of a calendar—up until yesterday.

Roughly 10,000 American, Australian and South Vietnamese infantrymen, armored squadrons and other support troops launched Operation Mastiff Monday when 48 helicopters dropped them into fringes of the 100-square-mile jungled stronghold known as Ho Bo Woods.

The "invading" troops met little resistance except for night-time harassment of defensive perimeters, mines and sniper fire. The Viet Cong had vanished.

The scattered houses—four years ago part of the Vietnamese government's famed strategic hamlet program—were empty. Only an occasional water buffalo was spotted.

The area is considered to be a strategically important corridor between two other Viet Cong strongholds—D Zone on the east and C Zone, bordering Cambodia, on the west. The three zones have been hit systematically by B-52 bombers. Yesterday's march through

Ho Bo Woods showed a number of gaping craters made by radar-controlled air strikes.

Massive American fire power is available each night to protect the front-line positions on such an offensive mission. Helicopters with searchlights scan the ground.

Artillery in the rear fires throughout the night into fled territory just beyond the defensive positions and transport aircraft sporadically drop 30-second flares. Automatic trip flares are also placed outside American defensive lines to create an instant warning system against any Viet Cong penetration.

Still, however, American armored squadrons sustained long-range Viet Cong mortar fire and recoilless rifle fire during the first night.

"But even with all these mechanical means, we'll always be one or two days behind the Viet Cong," one American officer explained.