



WHEN TANKS

TOOK OVER

THE TALKING

I was bundled out of Dacca on an army truck packed with other Western journalists last night at half an hour's notice.

We had been confined to a hotel since Thursday, when the army moved in to crush the breakaway attempt by the East Pakistani leader, Sheik Mujibur Rahman.

After throwing our belongings into suit cases, we were trundled along the deserted airport road in an armed convoy past blazing shops and home-made barricades.

Everyone was rigorously searched at the airport and films, tapes and even shorthand notes were seized by troops.

Until now, because of total censorship in Dacca, I have been unable to tell of the crackdown

HOWARD WHITTEN, of AAP-Reuter, one of 35 correspondents expelled from Dacca during the weekend, filed this eye-witness account

on Sheik Mujib's non-co-operation movement which paralysed the Government, education and commerce for over three weeks.

On Friday, menacing plumes of black smoke curled above Dacca and sporadic bursts of automatic fire crackled in the silent night, 18 hours after the army rolled in to crackdown on Sheik Mujib's followers.

The first sign that the military regime had lost patience with wrangling politicians was a sudden influx of troops into the Hotel Intercontinental, where

journalists were staying.

A captain ordered nobody to move outside, on pain of being shot.

Troops then hauled down and burnt a giant Bangla Desh (Bengal nation) flag the hotel staff had made and hoisted 12 hours earlier.

By then rumors spread that President Yahya Khan, who had spent 11 days here trying to solve the crisis, had left. Phone calls to his house went unanswered.

Soon the whole phone and

cable system went dead and dimly lit army convoys trundled past the hotel. At one a.m. a phone call to Sheik Mujib's home established he was there, but half an hour later the line was dead.

Then isolated pistol shots were followed by the boom of recoilless rifles.

Fires began to light the horizon. The militant Bengali nationalist paper, The People, was blazing near the hotel and even bigger fires in the university residence hall and on the airport road could be seen.

Patton tanks clattered along the roads and tracer bullets flecked the sky as truckloads of troops shuttled back and forth.

Troops battle rag-tag rebels