

9 Years: 7 Million Tons of U.S. Bombs

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In 6½ months since the cease-fire went into effect in Vietnam Jan. 28, U.S. planes have dropped 239,761 tons of bombs on Cambodia and, to a lesser extent, Laos, in a campaign that cost about \$422.8 million, according to statistics released by the Pentagon yesterday.

The bombing in Cambodia was to end at midnight last night under a congressional ban on U.S.

combat activities in Southeast Asia. That action will ring down the curtain on a nine-year-old air war during which some 7.5 million tons of U.S. bombs were dropped on South Vietnam (which got about half the total), North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Since the Jan. 28 Paris agreement, which officially at least ended the fighting in North and South Vietnam for this country, 27,626 strikes by fighter-bombers

and another 7,784 by B-52s were made inside Cambodia as the United States shifted its air power to that battlefield in an attempt to force North Vietnamese compliance with a cease-fire there and stave off a defeat for government troops at the hands of Communist insurgents.

Like the long air war in Vietnam; however, there is certain to be debate for some time to come about just how effective the mass

bombing was in the battle for Cambodia.

As matters stand now, there seems little prospect for a quick cease-fire and the battle is inconclusive. Proponents of the bombing argue that without U.S. air power, the government of President Lon Nol would have fallen months ago.

Others argue that the forces came to rely too heavily and for too long on the U.S. planes, and that the

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air support simply prolonged the point at which the government forces will have to learn to fight better with their own infantry, artillery and tiny 50-plane air force.

The bombing in Cambodia, as publicly disclosed only within the past month, actually began in March, 1969, with the start of a top-secret, 14-month bombing campaign involving 3,630 B-52 raids and extending until April, 1970.

All told, in those early raids plus the thousands that followed through last night, Pentagon figures indicate that just over a half-million tons of bombs were dropped on Cambodia in 4½ years.

The most recent phase of that campaign since last January, including some raids into Laos early in February, added another 10 airplanes to the number lost during the entire air war, and resulted in the death of 14 airmen. Four others were added to the roughly 1,260-man missing-in-action list.

Overall, the total aircraft and helicopter losses from all causes during the nine years since U.S. Navy carrier jets first streaked toward North Vietnam in August, 1964, are considerable.

All told, 3,706 fixed-wing

planes and 4,866 helicopters were shot down, blown up, crashed or otherwise put out of service in Southeast Asia, according to Pentagon figures. Some 4,240 pilots, air crew and other personnel riding in those planes were killed.

The Vietnam cease-fire agreement came on the heels of massive U.S. air attacks around Hanoi and Haiphong, lending some credence to the prospect that air power at least was a factor in forcing the war toward a settlement. But the Nixon administration had its hand forced in Cambodia by a Congress which questioned the constitutionality

of the bombing and saw no end in sight to the raids.

While the situation is generally regarded as gloomy for the Cambodian government forces, Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently pointed out that the insurgents have also suffered heavy losses recently, have supply problems and face the prospect of being bogged down through August and September in monsoon rains.

The government is credited with about 190,000 troops, roughly half of them

around the capital of Phnom Penh. The insurgents are estimated to have less than half as many soldiers as the government, but they control about 80 per cent of the land though perhaps only 20 per cent of the population, according to Pentagon estimates.

Some officials believe that the Communist pressure on Phnom Penh may ease slightly, with the local Communist forces turning attention to some provincial capitals where government forces are gradually drawing into a series of protective enclaves.

The Pentagon has said it will continue to fly unarmed reconnaissance flights over Cambodia and keep flying about six transports daily into that country with military aid allowed under the congressional restrictions.

Though there is a risk that the transport planes might be fired upon, Defense Department spokesmen have said they hope Communist forces will not take such action. If they did, the Pentagon said, Congress would have to change the law before U.S. military retaliation could be undertaken.

At the White House yesterday deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren reiterated that the administration will do everything legally permissible "to support the government of Cambodia."