

3 Planes Lost

U.S. Halts Bombing Of North Vietnam

By Peter A. Jay

Washington Post Foreign Service

SAIGON, Dec. 30—American bombing of North Vietnam was halted this afternoon after five days of round-the-clock strikes by hundreds of U.S. aircraft.

The American command here announced the termination of the "limited duration, protective reaction strikes" about an hour after the last plane left North Vietnamese air space at 3:36 p.m. (2:36 a.m. EST).

The command, giving its first account of the raids since they began Sunday, also reported.

- Three aircraft were lost in the course of the operation, two of them today, and only one of the six crewmen was recovered. North Vietnamese radio claimed today that a total of 14 planes were downed over the five-day bombing period.

[Later, Hanoi Radio raised the number to a total of 19 American planes shot down, news agencies reported.]

- The targets, all south of the 20th parallel and mostly south of the 18th parallel, were entirely military and included airfields, missile and antiaircraft artillery sites, air defense radar installations and fuel supplies built up near the mountain passes that lead into Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

- Forty six Navy and Air Force attack planes—not counting reconnaissance, radar, tanker and rescue aircraft—participated in the first day's strikes, and about 240 strike sorties were flown on each of the last four days.

- At least 23 surface-to-air (SAM) missiles were fired at the U.S. planes, seven of them today. At least 11 SAM and antiaircraft artillery sites were "successfully attacked" and presumably destroyed.

- Antiaircraft fire was "light to moderate" on the first three days and "heavy" on the last two. "I guess they were still having a Christmas

holiday when we started," an American briefing officer said.

The threat of North Vietnamese Mig fighters, which has had military men here and in Washington openly worried for several weeks, apparently failed to materialize, according to reports given by the command in Saigon.

"An Air Force Phantom [F-4] had sort of an engagement with a Mig near the border with Laos on Dec. 26, a military spokesman said, "but neither plane fired at the other. That's all there was."

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BOMBING, From A1

The command reported that some of the northernmost targets struck—near the 20th parallel, about 70 miles south of Hanoi—near airfields "from which there has been increasing Mig activity in recent weeks."

North Vietnamese radio has reported American planes bombing as far north as the provincial capital of Thanhhoa. Yesterday, the radio broadcast gave names of two air force pilots whose plane it said was downed there Dec. 26. It did not say if the men were killed or captured alive.

The U.S. Command has not said where the three planes it acknowledges losing were downed, but it did say an air force F-4 was lost on Dec. 26 and that the crew is missing.

Today, two Navy planes, an F-4 and an A-6 bomber, were reported shot down over North Vietnam. The command in Saigon said that one of the two crewmen from the A-6 was recovered, but that the other three are listed as missing and that search-and-rescue operations are complete.

The reason for the strikes, said the command, was that given Monday by Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird: "To protect the safety and security

of diminishing U.S. forces during our withdrawal from South Vietnam."

North Warned

Echoing Laird, the command said that "the North Vietnamese have been told repeatedly that action would be taken to protect the lives of U.S. military personnel should the enemy threaten our aircraft, or engage in efforts to achieve a significant logistics buildup, or violate the Demilitarized Zone."

Radio Hanoi, in its morning "News to the South," labeled the bombings an "insolent and mad act of war that exposes more clearly the stubborn and warlike nature of the Nixon administration." It said the planes bombed "villages, cities, hospitals, schools and rice-fields."

In its noon news bulletin, the radio—which for four days was the only source of information available here on the raids—said that 14 U.S. planes were shot down in the five days, three of them today.

It said six of the planes were downed in Quangbinh Province, just over the DMZ, six in Nghean Province near the coastal city of Vinh, and two in Thanhhoa.

South Vietnamese reaction to the air strikes, political hotbed that Saigon is, remained calm and even fatalistic. Most newspapers and politicians—the only ones discussing it—saw the bombings as a

Nixon political counter being prepared for a Peking bargaining session.

Military Impact

The military impact of the five day's bombing, is yet to be seen, but it will almost certainly be a sharp setback in North Vietnamese infiltration—at least for a while.

Whether the strikes will discourage North Vietnamese MIGs from rising to harass American reconnaissance planes and B-52s bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, as they did earlier this month, is another question that only time can answer.

Five air force Phantom jets were shot down in northern Laos, one of them by a North Vietnamese Mig-21 and two by groundfire over a three-day period beginning Dec. 17.

The other military objective was to blunt an anticipated major enemy ground thrust around or across the DMZ.

into Quangtri Province and northern South Vietnam. There too, the only way to find out how much time has been bought is to wait and see.

"We're trying to do by air what the South Vietnamese tried to do when they went into Laos on the ground a year ago," a navy pilot said some time ago. "Slow 'em down, just slow 'em down."

Only 1 GI Slain

In Combat Last Week

From News Dispatches

One American soldier was killed in combat in Indochina last week, the lowest number of combat deaths in the war since February, 1965, when no one was killed.

The U.S. military command attributed the low casualty toll of one death and 29 wounded to the reduction of Communist activity during its three-week Christmas cease-fire.

South Vietnamese government casualties also dropped considerably last week, to 287 killed and 633 wounded compared to 405 dead and 723 wounded the previous week. Communist casualties were put at 1,035.

Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese delegation to the Vietnam peace talks in Paris yesterday condemned the U.S. bombing of the North as a "new and extremely grave escalation" in the war.

The Soviet Union announced it would give additional aid to strengthen North Vietnam's defense following talks "of major significance" with an unidentified Hanoi delegation. No details on the new aid agreement were given.

A government statement also denounced what it termed Washington's continued effort

to impose "a military solution on the Vietnam problem."

The New China News Agency described the air attacks on North Vietnam as "shameless war blackmail" and rejected all U.S. justifications for the bombing as "dyed-in-the-wool gangster logic."

In the Indochina ground war, Communist forces in Laos moved for the first time behind Long Cheng, headquarters of the CIA-supported Meo army just off the edge of the Plain of Jars, and overran a government strong point and air strip at Muong Poun, 12 miles west of the strategic base.

A Laotian military spokesman also said that government troops had failed to recapture Paksong, a town on the north-eastern sector of the Bolovens Plateau, after trying several times to retake it.

In Cambodia, 25,000 South Vietnamese troops ended a 39-day drive into the eastern part of the country against staging areas of three North Vietnamese divisions.

South Vietnamese military headquarters claimed 1,336 North Vietnamese troops were killed during the Cambodian operation, many of them by massive U.S. air support.

However, the military command reported only 196 weapons captured, indicating the claim of enemy deaths was probably considerably inflated. Saigon's losses were reported as 86 troops killed and 226 wounded.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting continued at two points north and south of Phnom Penh, the Cambodian military command reported. It said the road to the provincial capital of Prey Veng had been cut and that Communist troops kidnaped about 500 Cambodian peasants from three villages 47 miles east of the capital.