

U.S. Planes Stage Scores of Raids On N. Vietnam

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Hanoi Says 5 Jets Down, Pilots Seized

SAIGON, Dec. 27 (Monday) (AP) — A U.S. strike force launched scores of air raids against North Vietnam yesterday and renewed the attacks today in an around-the-clock bombing campaign. North Vietnam claimed five planes were shot down and five pilots captured.

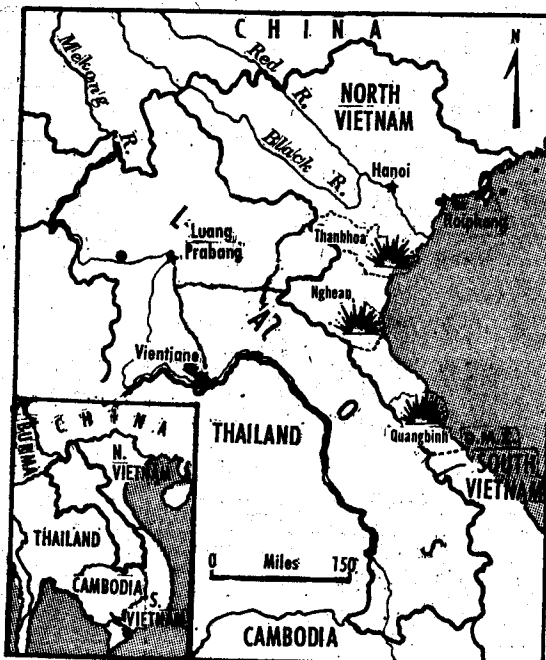
It was believed that the U.S. attack force may have totalled 350 planes.

The U.S. Command, giving out few details, declined comment on the North Vietnamese claims, but field reports from search and rescue units indicated there had been some American losses.

The new campaign, perhaps the biggest since the full-scale bombing halt on Nov. 1, 1968, was aimed at crippling North Vietnam's antiaircraft defense network and in part retaliation for the downing of four U.S. jets a week ago, informants said.

The command would not say in what areas the raids were being carried out, but the Soviet news agency Tass quoted Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam as reporting that five American planes were shot down over Quangbinh, Nghean and Thanhhoa provinces. This would put the closest strikes within 80 miles of Hanoi.

Quangbinh is the southernmost province in North Viet-



Hanoi claims U.S. planes were shot down over three North Vietnamese provinces indicated by bomb bursts.

nam, just above the Demilitarized Zone, and includes the Mugia Pass, a key entry point to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the coastal city of Donghoi, which has an air field. Nghean is in central North Vietnam and includes the Barthelemy Pass leading to northern Laos, the coastal city of Vinh, which has a Mig air base, and the Quanglang air field.

Thanhhoa is 80 miles due south of Hanoi.

It is in the areas of the Mugia and Barthelemy passes that the North Vietnamese have doubled their antiaircraft defenses to protect their supply routes against U.S. bombing raids and where numerous aerial engagements have occurred in the past several days. The Mig air bases were said also to be targets of the U.S. raids.

In air engagements last week, four U.S. pilots were captured, two are missing and two were rescued.

U.S. informants in Saigon said the latest raids were approved by President Nixon. They came less than 24 hours after Radio Hanoi warned in a broadcast that no American prisoners of war would be released "so long as U.S. warplanes continue to violate North Vietnam and the Nixon administration refuses to take the steps necessary to end the war."

The U.S. Command said other information on the raids would not be provided until they are completed, "for reasons of military security and

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the safety of our pilots." In the past, the command has not announced air losses until search and rescue operations had been completed.

The U.S. Command would not disclose the geographical area of the strikes.

The targets were described only as "military targets in North Vietnam," and the command said the strikes "are in reaction to enemy activity which imperils the diminishing U.S. forces currently in South Vietnam."

Asked how anti-aircraft defenses imperil the diminishing U.S. forces currently in South Vietnam, one informant said: "Increasing Mig and anti-aircraft activity inhibits U.S. air operations over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos where most of the supplies come into South Vietnam. These war materials, if they reach North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces in South Vietnam, can endanger the remaining U.S. forces."

Thus, the strikes are a warning to North Vietnam to ease up on attacks on U.S. planes bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail and supporting government forces in northern Laos.

If the latest raids follow the pattern of eight previous enlarged strikes since May, 1970, the targets likely included troop buildup, truck parks, supply depots, fuel depots, surface-to-air missile sites and associated equipment, radar stations and other anti-aircraft defenses.

There was strong speculation that some Mig air bases were attacked, since U.S. reconnaissance planes had been photographing them frequently in the past two weeks. There are a half dozen Mig air bases in the Hanoi area and several others to the south.

The magnitude of the strikes was underscored by the command's statement that planes from both the U.S. Air Force and Navy took part.

The United States has a strike force of about 350 warplanes in Southeast Asia, flying from bases in Thailand and South Vietnam, and the carriers Constellation and Coral Sea.

Pentagon sources said last week that the North Vietnamese have more than doubled the number of anti-aircraft missiles and larger-caliber guns guarding their supply

routes and passes into Laos.

These sources said the heavy buildup of anti-aircraft weapons has increased the hazards for U.S. warplanes striking enemy supplies being trucked to North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

A massive U.S. air campaign is under way to slow the flow of supplies southward during the current dry season in efforts to blunt North Vietnamese offensives.

As the United States has increased its air attacks over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, the North Vietnamese have heightened their attacks on the American planes to protect their supply lifeline to the south. Nearly a score of engagements have been reported in the past two weeks. A half dozen U.S. planes have been shot down since Dec. 10.

Congressman Critical Of CIA in Laos

SAIGON, Dec. 26 (UPI)—Rep. G. V. Montgomery (D-Miss.) said today that the North Vietnamese could take over Laos whenever they wanted.

Montgomery, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, told a news conference he will ask the Nixon administration to take a "good hard look" at the American involvement in Laos.

"What I know about Laos is that the CIA has done a pretty lousy job and has been ineffective," he said.

Meanwhile, the Vietcong radio broadcast two more Christmas messages from Americans alleged by the Communists to be prisoners of war in South Vietnam. The U.S. Command said it did not have on its list of 1,497 missing Americans the names of the alleged prisoners, but said its list might be incomplete.