

U.S. to Give Daily Combat Casualties by

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SAIGON, March 5 — The U.S. military command announced a change in information policy today designed to narrow its credibility gap at home and discredit Hanoi's propaganda about military actions in the Vietnam war.

Military spokesmen said that beginning today the number of Americans killed and wounded in combat would be released daily rather than using the sometimes misleading tags of "light," "moderate" and "heavy" to describe U.S. casualties.

Casualties consist of killed and wounded, and wounded includes those who require only first aid.

'Series of Ambiguities'

The reason for the change in policy was two-fold. First, the United States has been concerned about "a series of ambiguities" at home about military actions in Vietnam. Secondly, the Administration was worried about the impressions Hanoi was receiving about the results of combat.

In one instance, a U.S. newspaper carried an eight-column front-page headline saying an American squad had been "wiped out" when it had only two men killed and seven wounded. The squad's losses were described in Saigon as "heavy." A squad is ten or twelve men.

"It is possible that public misunderstanding has been even greater than that of the press," said a military command memorandum explaining the new policy.

On the other side, "it appeared that Hanoi is beginning to believe their own propaganda," said one source. The North Vietnamese regularly report greatly exaggerated—and favorable to them—results of military clashes both to their public, and, it

seems, to higher headquarters as well.

Losses Overstated

"There is good evidence from captured documents that the enemy has consistently grossly overstated friendly losses in his reports," the military memorandum said.

"This new policy should knock some holes in that," said one American Hanoi watcher.

To correct any misreading of the previously used labels, the military will give the exact number of casualties each day with a few exceptions. Thus if an American company, about 175 men, suffers five killed and twelve wounded the tally would be reported rather than being termed "moderate" as before.

The military command explained today that "light" meant casualties up to 5 per cent of a unit, "moderate" 6 to 15 per cent casualties, and "heavy" more than 15 per cent.

Previous Use of Term

However, before today military spokesmen used the word heavy to describe losses that left a unit incapable of func-

tioning as a unit of its original size.

That is two platoons that suffered "heavy" losses, say 25 dead and 30 wounded, would not be operating as two platoons after sustaining such casualties, but as a platoon. A combat platoon is about 35 men.

Most of the figures would

be realized within 24 hours of the operation, a spokesman said. One exception is when the cumulative enemy and American casualties are not "significant," that is, if combined losses total less than ten.

Another exception is "military security," or when the unit is still in a heated fire-

Number

fight with an opposing force and the command does not want to inform the Communists of its casualties.

Although the figures will be given now, there will be no designation of the units below brigade, regiment or group level "for military security and concern for members of smaller units."