

Battle Flights

Ky Led Raids On Cambodia

Saigon

An aide confirmed yesterday that Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky reverted to his air force days when the Cambodian border war began and led the first big South Vietnamese air attacks against enemy sanctuaries in the Parrot's Beak area.

Flying an American-built F-5 Freedom fighter, Ky led the mission in late April which involved upward of 90 planes and which was probably the largest coordinated series of raids ever flown by the South Vietnamese Air Force.

"We did not publicize it at the time," the aide said. "Sometimes we have to sneak out and do these things without the newsmen knowing."

OTHERS

The 40-year-old former Air Force commander, who also led the first South Vietnamese attacks on North Vietnam in 1965, flew some other missions into Cambodia after the first raid. One of these was a similarly coordinated raid on sanctuaries in the so-called Fishhook area northwest of Saigon.

In none of these was Ky's jet hit, although the raids did encounter antiaircraft fire, notably in the Parrot's Beak west of Saigon.



NGUYEN CAO KY
Interested in MIGs

Ky flew from Tan Son Nhut air base just outside Saigon, where he lives in the bungalow he has always kept since his days as air vice marshal commanding the South Vietnamese air force.

CONTROL

Although the air force is now commanded by Air commodore Tran Van Minh, Ky as premier and later as vice president has always retained the control which is one of the main sources of his political strength.

As one of the first pilots in the South Vietnamese air force when it was trained by the French, Ky has always been in the forefront and has often flown unpublicized missions, including three secret flights to Phnom Penh when he was the negotiator in the initial contacts with the government of Premier Lon Nol.

"When the first attacks were being planned, Ky just wanted to be back with his buddies," an Aide said. "Flying and fighting. That is what he considers the easy part of his job."

"After the early days in Cambodia he stopped and put back on his business suit. He hasn't flown any combat missions since," the Aide said.

THIEU

The aide said there was no pressure from the palace of President Nguyen Van Thieu to keep the vice president from flying and the decision to stop combat missions, at least temporarily, was Ky's own.

The Aide said Ky did not

take any unusual chances on the missions.

"That word flamboyant is something that you newsmen invented," the aide said.

During one of his missions to Phnom Penh Ky sought out the handful of Cambodian pilots who fly Russian MIGs.

"He had never touched a MIG before and he was interested," the aide said. "He sort of told the Cambodians, you bring your toys over and let us play with them and we will let you play with ours."

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