

FOE SAID TO FIRE ACROSS THE DMZ AT U.S. AIRCRAFT

U.S. Command in Saigon
Says No Planes Were Hit
in 3 Missile Attacks

ACTION IS FIRST OF KIND

8 Helicopters Destroyed
in Laos Operation, the
Biggest Toll in a Day

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, March 4 — North Vietnamese gunners have fired antiaircraft missiles across the demilitarized zone at American planes flying over South Vietnam, the United States command reported yesterday.

The command, which said the attacks were the first of their kind in the Vietnam war, also disclosed that eight American helicopters were shot down and destroyed yesterday while supporting the South Vietnamese drive against enemy supply trails in southern Laos.

This was described as the highest toll for a day since the beginning of the operation in Laos on Feb. 8. The command said one crewman was killed, seven were wounded and eight were listed as missing as a result of the eight crashes.

In announcing the missile attacks, the command said that one Soviet-made missile was fired from North Vietnam Tuesday morning at a Navy A-7 fighter-bomber returning from a strike along the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in Laos. The plane, flying over South Vietnam 12 miles northwest of the base at Khesanh, was not damaged.

Attacked Over Laos

A second missile was also sent across the six-mile-deep zone at the border between North Vietnam and South Vietnam against an Army reconnaissance plane flying over South Vietnam 11 miles north of Khesanh.

The command said that a third missile from North Vietnam had been directed against an A-7 flying over Laos in support of the South Vietnamese operation, now in its fourth week. The missile did not hit the plane, which was flying 12 miles north-northwest of Lao Bao, a border crossing point.

The announcement of the firings raised the question of whether this command was setting the stage for intensified air strikes against the antiair-

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craft missile sites and other targets in North Vietnam.

In the past, missile firings have rarely been announced, and then only when the threatened American warplanes have fired back. In the attacks announced yesterday, the planes did not return the fire.

United States helicopter pilots, who have flown more than 20,000 sorties over Laos in the last three weeks, report that they are encountering the heaviest antiaircraft fire of the war. Thirty helicopters have been shot down in the operation, including the eight reported lost yesterday. Many others have crashed but have been recovered.

American commanders, it appears, must now take into account the possibility of intensified threats to aircraft flying in support of the operation just below the demilitarized zone in South Vietnam. The skies over South Vietnam's northernmost province are crowded daily with huge cargo planes and other aircraft carrying men and supplies to Khesanh, the key base for the South Vietnamese assaults into Laos.

In the Laos operation, meanwhile, battlefield activity was again reported relatively light.

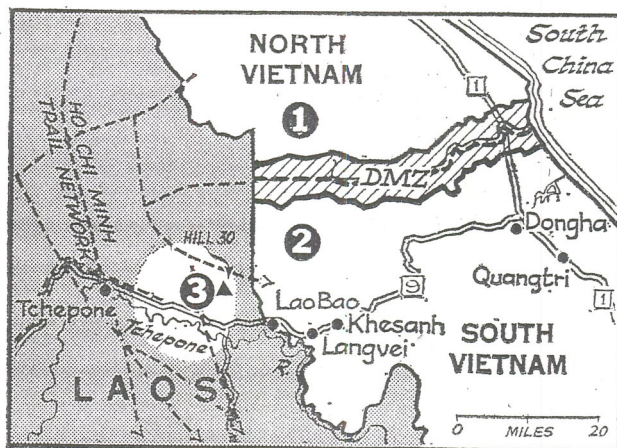
South Vietnamese spokesmen reported yesterday that the heaviest fighting came around Hill 30, eight miles northeast of Lao Bao. For 10 hours, the command said, South Vietnamese paratroopers, supported by air strikes and artillery, clashed with North Vietnamese soldiers.

The spokesmen said that 98 enemy soldiers had been killed, while the South Vietnamese suffered one dead and three wounded. Of the enemy casualties, the spokesmen reported, 60 were killed by air and artillery strikes.

More South Vietnamese marines were being flown across the border in American helicopters to reinforce the rangers, paratroops, infantry and armored units already in Laos.

The spokesmen said the additional troops brought to 18,000 the number of South Vietnamese now operating across the border.

During the 24-hour period ended at 6 P.M. Tuesday, the Saigon command said, 365 enemy soldiers were killed in the operation, bringing enemy casualties to 3,600. It said that 341 South Vietnamese soldiers had been killed and 1,112 wounded.



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Missile sites in North Vietnam (1) fired at American aircraft flying over South Vietnam near Khesanh (2). In Laos, fighting was reported in Hill 30 area (3).