

Base Hit

South of Da Nang

Associated Press

Saigon

North Vietnamese commandoes attacking under the cover of a mortar barrage, swept through a U.S. artillery base south of Da Nang yesterday, killing 33 Americans and wounding 76.

The casualties were the highest suffered by an American unit in a single action in more than two years.

A U.S. command spokesman said commandoes blasted their way through the barbed-wire defenses of the base 50 miles south of Da Nang and then hurled dynamite bombs into the defenders' foxholes and trenches.

A barrage of some 60 mortar shells had pinned the Americans down while the commandoes moved in, the spokesman said. The attack lasted about an hour and 12 enemy soldiers were reported killed by the defenders with the help of helicopter gunships, fighter-bombers and artillery that blasted the rim of the base's perimeter.

PATROLS

The base, held by soldiers of the 196th Brigade, Americal Division, "remains in friendly control and extensive action is being conducted in the area," a spokesman said, indicating patrols were trying to find the commando units.

Farther north B-52 bombers concentrated again yesterday on major arteries of Hanoi's Ho Chi Minh supply trail in Laos in an all-out effort to prevent North Vietnamese forces and supplies from moving south.

Military sources in Saigon said the bombers, each carrying up to 30 tons of explosives, attacked North Vietnamese troop concentrations, base areas and supply caches leading south from Sepone at the hub of the network. Sepone is 25 miles inside Laos.

The sources said the South Vietnamese in their recent drive to cut the trail apparently missed some ene-

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my stockpiles of war supplies. And North Vietnam has pushed fresh supplies down the trail since South Vietnamese troops retreated from the area last week.

The informants also said that American planes had attacked the trail with such intensity in March that the B-52s had already exceeded the 1000 sorties allocated them per month by the Pentagon.

They said that more than 75 per cent of the entire U.S. air effort in Indochina is being diverted to Laos. In addition to the B-52 raids, tactical fighter-bombers and fixed-wing gunships are averaging about 2500 attack sorties a week in the Southern panhandle of Laos. A sortie is one mission by one plane.

Another 400 sorties a week are being made in support of Royal Laotian government troops fighting Communist forces in northern Laos. Battles have been raging in the Plain of Jars region and around the royal capital of Luang Prabang where North Vietnamese forces are keeping up heavy pressure.

A report from the Luang Prabang area said that reinforced Laotian government forces had driven a North Vietnamese regiment back five miles from the edge of the royal capital's airport.

The Laotian command described the situation as "improved." The residents of Luang Prabang expressed confidence that enemy forces would not attempt to seize the royal capital because of the continued presence of King Savang Vatthana. The Communist Pathet Lao, allies of the North Vietnamese, recognize the king as sovereign.

Scattered fighting was reported in South Vietnam. A U.S. convoy was ambushed on Highway 9 east of Khe Sanh.

Initial field reports said five Americans were killed and some armored personnel carrier were hit by rocket-propelled grenades.