

# U.S. Jungle-Clearing Bombs Now Turned on Troops

By **CRAIG R. WHITNEY**

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam April 14—Military officers here say the United States command used seven-and-one-half-ton bombs in the Central Highlands this week primarily to clear the thick jungle canopy from North Vietnamese storage areas near the Laotian border, but also to kill enemy soldiers who might be nearby.

The giant bombs, the largest conventional ones in the American arsenal, have been used before to clear landing zones for helicopters.

Their concussive effect, however, is so great in open country that anyone within 4,500 feet of a blast who is not killed may suffer serious injury. In heavy jungle, like that west of the border posts of Benhet and Fire Base 6 where the bombs have been used, the effect is less severe.

## 2 Types of Missions

B-52 raids produce similar results because of the massed effect on their 30-ton loads of 750-pound 500-pound bombs. These are often directed against troop concentrations more accurately than it is possible to guide the 15,000-pound devices, which are slid out the back of a four-engine C-130 cargo aircraft and floated to earth by parachute.

Since Fire Base 6 was briefly overrun by North Vietnamese attackers last March 31, there have been 24 B-52 missions each of three or more of the eight-engine bombers, and six of the seven-and-one-half-ton bomb strikes. All were in deserted jungle areas between Benhet and Fire Base 6 and the Laotian border.

The Vietnamese ground forces have not yet moved into the bombed area, an enemy base-camp complex known as 609. United States military officers here say that they have not been able to assess the results of the huge explosions or to see whether any enemy soldiers have been killed by them.

"We dropped them because we suspected there were supply truck parks, and maybe some troops down there," a military officer said.

## Foe Close to Top of Hill

The strikes were requested by the Vietnamese 22d Infantry Division, which now has 13 battalions near Dakto to combat what is regarded as a major enemy threat to the Central Highlands. It is also known to be considering a plan to invade Base Area 609, possibly beyond the Laotian and Cambodian borders, which converge with Vietnam's frontier to the west of Dakto.

A spokesman for the Vietnamese command in Pleiku said that none of the giant bombs had been dropped close to Fire Base 6, which has been under siege for the last two weeks by enemy soldiers who are within 50 yards of the top of the hill on which the base is situated.

"If we really had indications of massed personnel where we dropped the 15,000-pounders, B-52's or tactical air strikes would be better," an Air Force officer said.

Up to 60 tactical strikes by jet and propeller-driven fighter-bombers of the Vietnamese and American air forces have been called in around the same areas. Some of the weapons they drop are designed specifically against personnel. The cluster-bomb units, for instance explode like firecrackers above the ground and separate into scores of bomblets. These explode when they hit the earth and scatter steel and fiberglass pellets in all directions.