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Heaviest Indochina Air Action in Years

SAIGON — (UPI) — U.S. Navy jets dodged seven guided missiles and chased a North Vietnamese Mig21 fighter back to its base in five separate air incidents reported yesterday, marking the heaviest period of air action in Indochina in more than 2½ years.

On the ground, a Communist booby trap killed seven American soldiers and wounded 23. It was the worst such incident in South Vietnam in more than a year and involved men of the Americal Division, a unit earmarked for withdrawal under the program to reduce American strength here.

The U.S. Command also said Communists killed four Americans in an attack against a unit of the U.S. Army 20th Engineers Brigade 24 miles northwest of Saigon. Thirteen other Americans were wounded.

Military sources said three U.S. Army helicopters were shot down yesterday over the A Shau Valley, raising to five the number lost in the past two days. The sources said some crewmen were wound-

ed yesterday but there were no injuries reported in the two lost Friday.

Saigon headquarters said U.S. troops may abandon the A Shau campaign while other military sources said the embryonic offensive may

—Turn to Page 12, Col. 4

Air Action Heats Up in S.E. Asia

—From Page 1

have been largely a smoke-screen.

South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu said last week that the offensive had started, but field reports told only of reconnaissance operations with major units held in reserve. There has been no significant contact.

U.S. headquarters reported one American plane damaged in the busy air action Friday, denying Communist claims that two aircraft were shot down.

Raids on Trail

The action ranged over both North Vietnam and Laos where Communist anti-aircraft defenses were reported stiffening in an attempt to cut the effectiveness of American air raids on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Saigon communiques gave these details:

• Two U.S. Navy F4 Phantom jets on a bombing mission in Laos sighted a North Vietnamese Mig 21 and pursued it to an airfield only 150 miles south of Hanoi. The MIG did not fire on the American planes and was not fired on. As the Navy

planes approached the base, North Vietnamese ground crews fired three missiles, and one of the Phantoms was damaged.

• A separate Communist anti-aircraft base fired two missiles at two Navy A7 Corsair bombers on a mission over Laos. Neither plane was hit and U.S. crews did not return the fire.

• A missile was fired at a unarmed Navy RF8 Crusader reconnaissance jet and its F8 Crusader escort fighter-bomber in North Vietnam 82 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. Again, no damage and no return fire.

• At least one missile was fired at a flight of four Navy A4 Skyhawk bombers escorting another unarmed reconnaissance plane 40 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. The Skyhawks fired back, but there were no immediate reports of damage.

• Five minutes later, the same reconnaissance plane received evidence of an electronic "lock-on" by a Communist anti-aircraft battery 92 miles north of the DMZ. One of the Skyhawks fired a missile, but again, no report of damage on either side.