

\$1.4 Million Raid

Red Commandos Blast 5 Copters

Saigon

A small band of Viet Cong commandos slipped into a South Vietnamese base near Saigon early yesterday and blew up five U.S. helicopters worth \$1.4 million.

Two of the commandos were sighted as they fled but there was no exchange of fire, the U.S. command reported.

They slipped undetected into the base camp at Di An, eight miles northeast of Saigon, and blew up the five helicopters with explosive charges. The U.S. command reported two of the helicopters destroyed and major damage to the other three.

The U.S. command also reported that an unarmed U.S. reconnaissance plane and its two fighter-bomber escorts were fired upon Tuesday while on a picture-taking mission over North Vietnam.

Two Russian-made SA-2 anti-aircraft missiles were fired at the American planes, while they were about 85 miles northwest of the demilitarized zone, the command said. The planes were not hit, the command added, and they did not fire back.

The U.S. command said the American flyers did not "visually observe" the SA-2 missiles, indicating that they apparently tracked the 35.5-foot-long "flying telephone poles" on their radar screens.

The command also reported the loss of a sixth American helicopter, a rocket-firing Cobra gunship shot down a half mile from U.S. Artillery Base Pace near the Cambodian border where fighting has been under way for 2½ weeks. Two crewmen were wounded.

At Artillery Base Pace, the U.S. garrison underwent its 18th straight day of North Vietnamese shelling. At least one American was wounded.

In the latest ground action in the region, South Vietnamese troops clashed with a North Vietnamese unit close

to beleaguered Artillery Base Alpha, just across the border in Cambodia.

The South Vietnamese claimed 29 enemy killed and give their own casualties as three wounded.

In Phnom Penh, the Cambodian high command claimed the capture of Phnom Santuk, a 600-foot hill 75 miles north of the capital, where a 20,000-man task force has been stalled for about two weeks in its drive to clear Highway 6.

The hill is one of three dominating Highway 6 on the road to the provincial capital of Kompung Thom, about five miles farther north.

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