

U.S. PLANES STAGE LARGE-SCALE RAID ON NORTH VIETNAM

Hanoi Reports Downing 5
That Attacked Provinces
Along Laotian Border
DEC 27 1971

NO DETAILS DISCLOSED

But Military Sources Say
That Every Available
Aircraft Was Used
NYTimes

By United Press International

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Monday, Dec. 27—United States Air Force and Navy planes attacked military installations in North Vietnam yesterday and today, the American command announced.

The command declined to give details on the scope of the raids, but information from military sources indicated that they were of far greater intensity than the usual "protective reaction" strikes, which generally involve one or two planes responding to North Vietnamese radar tracking or antiaircraft missile fire.

[The Hanoi radio, in a broadcast monitored in Saigon, said that five American F-4 Phantom jets had been shot down in the provinces of Quangbinh, Thanhhoa and Nghean, all of which are in the western part of North Vietnam adjoining the Laotian border.]

Military sources said that the raid yesterday involved every aircraft the United States could spare in Indochina, the planes coming from South Vietnam, Thailand and the aircraft carriers Constellation and Coral Sea off the coast in the South China Sea. [The Associated Press reported that 350 planes took part in the raids.]

Comment Withheld

Several large air strikes have been made into North Vietnam since President Lyndon B. Johnson officially halted regular bombing of the north in 1968. The last involved some 200 separate strikes in late September.

The United States command's statement on the raid yesterday, on which spokesmen declined to elaborate, said in its entirety:

"For a limited duration, protective reaction air strikes against military targets in North Vietnam are being conducted by United States Air Force and United States Navy aircraft. The air strikes are in reaction to enemy activity which imperils the diminishing United States forces currently in South Vietnam.

"When these limited duration

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air strikes, which are being conducted to protect the safety and security of our remaining American forces in South Vietnam, are completed, additional details will be provided. Until that time, for reasons of military security and safety of our pilots, we will have nothing further to say."

It is usual command policy to withhold comment until search and rescue operations for the downed aircraft and their crewmen are completed.

Last weekend, the North Vietnamese downed five Phantom jets, but the command withheld details of the losses for 48 hours. North Vietnam captured four of the pilots. Of the six other crewmen in the planes, the command listed four as missing and presumed dead and two as rescued.

Air War Intensifies

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

Special to The New York Times

HONG KONG, Dec. 26—The air strikes against North Vietnam followed by a week of a serious intensification of the air war over Laos, when North Vietnamese Mig-21 jet

fighter-bombers crossed the border and clashed with American planes supporting Laotian ground troops on the Plaine des Jarres.

Four United States Air Force Phantom jets were lost last weekend after the first air-to-air-battle of the war over Laos. Four crewmen were taken prisoners.

Other planes flying in the same area over the Plaine des Jarres in the last week have taken what they call "protective reactions" against North Vietnamese air defenses in the border areas. The 107th such strike of the year on the border area was announced only yesterday.

Supply Trail Is Target

The air war in Laos has continued unabated in recent weeks, not only in the northern part of the country, where the Communists took over the plain-de Jarres, but also farther south, along the Ho Chi Minh supply trail in the southern panchannel. The trail has been the principal target for American bombs since the regular bombing of North Vietnam was suspended in November, 1968.

The bombing there intensified with the coming of the dry sea-

son in November and December west of the Annamite Mountains to more than 5,000 sorties a month. A sortie is a single mission by a single plane.

Military officers in Saigon have cited the large built-up of supplies at staging area inside North Vietnam this year as evidence of the enemy's continuing determination to use the trails to mount attacks farther south. Pilots have also reported sighting 200 to 300 trucks a day shuttling south on the trail system.

The Nixon Administration has said the bombing was necessary to protect the 160,000 American troops still in South Vietnam.

In the past, as recently as last September, the United States command has sent hun-

dreds of airplanes against supply storage areas and oil depots inside North Vietnam.

The reasoning has been that petroleum products fuel the supply trucks that move down the trails at night.

There have been eight such a "limited duration" air strikes since May, 1970, in addition to hundreds of protective reactions in which American pilots have taken action against radar sites and missile defenses in North Vietnam that threatened them.

But this year, for the first time, the North Vietnamese have moved to bolster their anti-aircraft defenses on and near the trail system in Laos, by sending MIG-21's aloft inside North Vietnam just east of the border on a dozen occasions in

the last month and occasionally deploying them across the border in the middle of the American formations.

Late in November, for the first time in the war, one of these MIG's fired a missile at an Air Force B-52 but missed. American pilots who escort the huge and lumbering eight-engine bombers have recently expressed their concern about the new challenge to them in the air.

The MIG's have been flying from recently improved air strips in the southern part of North Vietnam, principally at Baithuong and Quanlang.

In addition, the Communists have deployed surface-to-air missiles at six to eight sites among the Laotian border near and south of the Mugia pass.