

Abandoned American Equipment

The Reds' Huge Military

Washington

The North Vietnamese have captured at least \$5 billion worth of American military equipment in their conquest of South Vietnam — making them the heavy-weight of Indochina and a power to be reckoned with in Asia.

Hanoi's victorious commanders are now in a better position than ever to wage industrial rather than guerrilla warfare, with modern weapons like American tanks lessening their need to rely on the stealth of small bands of soldiers.

The new Vietnam could end up with the premier air force in its part of the world, but this possibility is clouded by the uncertainty of how many South Vietnamese aircraft flew into Thailand and who will get them ultimately.

Military officials here predict Vietnam's victorious military leaders will resist the temptation the South Vietnamese succumbed to — relying on helicopters to take troops into battle by day rather than making punishing marches to the objective by night.

If these predictions are correct, then the new Vietnam will stand ready to wage either guerrilla or industrial warfare — twin objectives the American force in Vietnam never really achieved.

U.S. commanders kept talking about the need to take the night away from the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, but never did it.

In waging industrial-type warfare, the two Vietnams could probably go to battle with at least 1000 tanks — five times as many as Thailand could field and about as many as Great Britain has.

South Vietnam had between 500 or 600 American-made M-48 and M-41 tanks and North Vietnam about 900 Soviet-supplied tanks. Even allowing for losses and taking apart some of the tanks to repair others, it seems certain 1000 battle-ready American and Soviet tanks — with lots of ammunition — would be available.

The victory also gives the Communist leadership lots of extra firepower, thanks to the capture of more than 1000 American artillery pieces, most likely including more than 100 big 175-mm guns.

The Pentagon believes that relatively little artillery ammunition was blown up

Booty

by the retreating South Vietnamese troops.

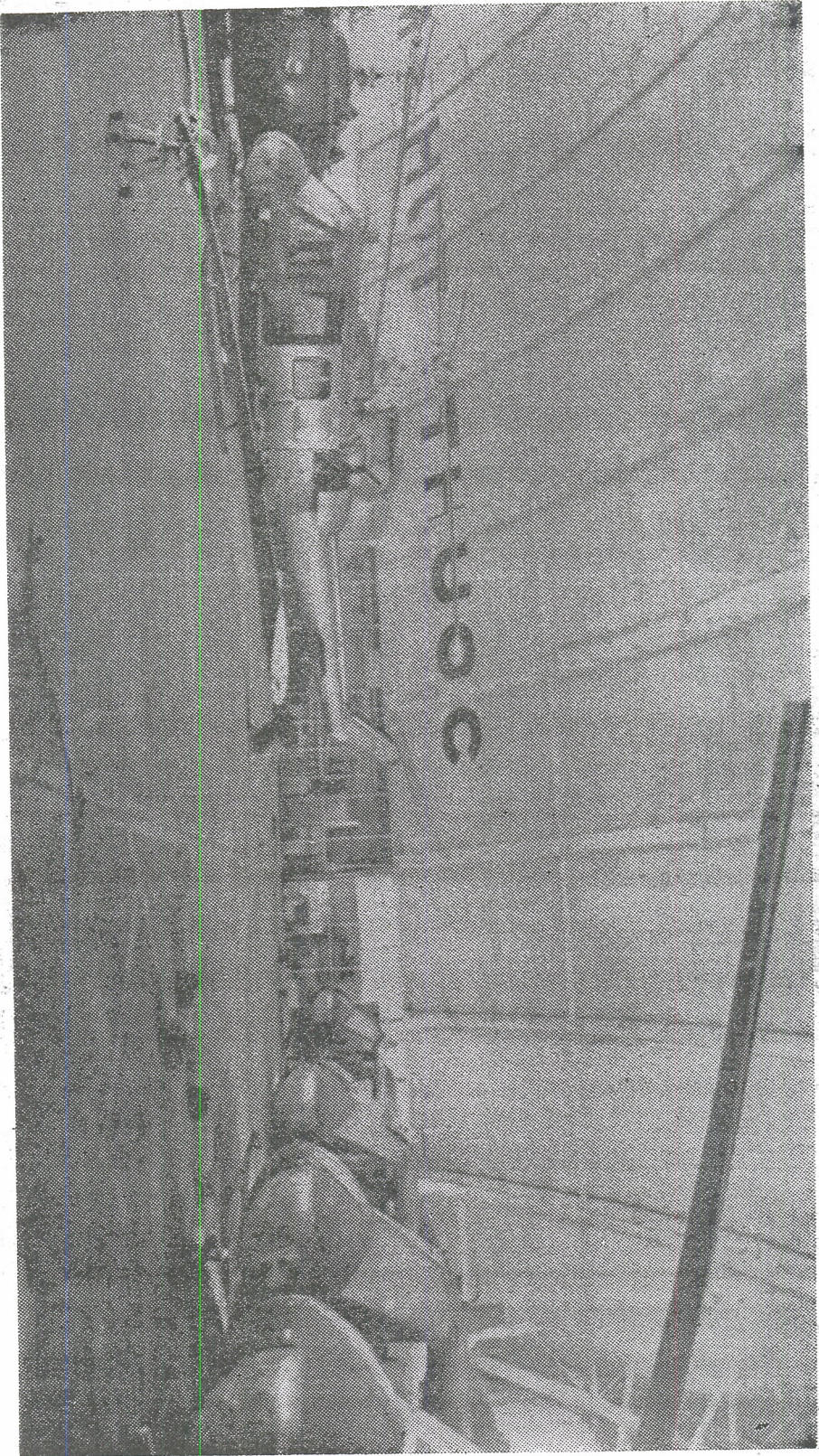
Military specialists here took some small comfort from the belief that Vietnam could not make the spare parts for some time to keep its armor and aircraft operating indefinitely.

However, the Soviet Union and China could decide to manufacture the parts needed for American weapons. The Vietnamese—like the Israelis before them—could fix, patch and improvise in the meantime to maximize the effectiveness of their American arms.

Other major military gains for the North Vietnamese are the bases and communications systems they captured largely intact. Cam Ranh Bay, for example, is a modern military commander's dream with its complex of air strips, deep water port, barracks and repair shops.

The Pentagon estimates that the North Vietnamese captured \$1 billion in facili-

Captured Copters



Abandoned American-made helicopters were lined up inside a hangar at a base in Hue abandoned to the Communists

AP Wirephoto

ties at American-built bases like Cam Ranh Bay. This figure is not the price of building those facilities—just the estimated worth as they stand today.

The rest of the \$5 billion in American military facilities and arms lost to the North Vietnamese consists, according to the Pentagon, of between \$2 billion and \$3 billion worth of weapons ranging from fighter-bombers to rifles; \$500 million in spare parts and engines in storage areas like Da Nang and Bien Hoa air bases; \$200 million to \$300 million in ammunition; \$20 million in fuel and lubricants.

For fear that South Vietnamese pilots might get out of American control and bomb distant targets which American policy-makers wanted to keep off-limits, the U.S. never gave Saigon long-range fighters and never trained the Vietnamese in aerial refueling or gave them fighter-bombers that could refuel in the air.

Thus the new pilots who will fly captured American-made planes will not be able to fly too far.

Last week the Pentagon and State Department were busy trying to shut off the supply pipeline to Vietnam.

The Pentagon estimates that between \$80 million and \$100 million in weapons were

en route to Vietnam, mostly by ship, when the Saigon government surrendered. The Military Sealift Command was going over the ship manifests to determine the cargo on each ship and radioing orders to the skipper to steam toward a new destination.

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