

# Johnson First Launched Big Raids on North in '65

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 27—

Nearly seven years after President Lyndon B. Johnson began sustained bombing of North Vietnam in an effort to save the South, another American President is relying heavily on airpower to achieve his objectives in Indochina.

Five times this year, including the current and most intense raids by hundreds of planes, President Nixon has ordered what are officially called "reinforced protective reaction strikes" against anti-aircraft installations, fuel depots and supply dumps in North Vietnam.

A senior Pentagon official acknowledged today that the raids constituted "a limited, selective resumption of the bombing," and Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird warned that more such raids might be ordered in the future with the over-all purpose of protecting American troops in South Vietnam.

Rolling Thunder — as Mr. Johnson's air war on the North was code-named — began on March 2, 1965, with the hope that the punishing effect of the bombing raids would persuade the Hanoi leaders to order the Vietcong guerrillas in South to halt their insurrection against the Saigon Government.

## Intimidation Effort

It had been held as doctrine by a number of American policy-makers since John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, that the threat of bombing, or bombing itself, would intimidate the North Vietnamese into halting the Vietcong activity.

However, in April, 1965, within a month of Rolling Thunder's start, the Johnson Administration found itself preparing to send American combat troops into the South to prevent a military victory by the Vietcong.

As United States infantrymen moved into South Vietnam that summer, the bombing campaign against the North was transformed into a long-range effort to choke off the flow of men and supplies that Hanoi began sending down the Ho Chi Minh Trail network through Laos to match the American build-up.

The hope of some day coercing Hanoi into a settlement remained, but the immediate objective of airpower was that of enabling American troops to win a military victory on the ground in the South by crippling the flow of reinforcements from the North.

Two years later, in August of 1967, Mr. Johnson's Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that airpower had failed. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was now an extensive network of jungle roads, and the bombing was not stopping the thousands of trucks that hauled men and supplies to the South each dry season.

President Johnson, nevertheless, escalated the bombing of the North that fall and winter — with no noticeable improvement.

In February, 1968, the enemy launched the Tet, or Lunar New Year. Offensive Vietcong and

North Vietnamese Army troops simultaneously attacked 36 South Vietnamese cities and towns. Mounting American casualties and the psychological shock of the Tet attack indicated that the strategy of winning a victory on the ground in the South with American troops could not succeed.

On March 31, 1963, Mr. Johnson restricted the bombing of the North to the 20th parallel in a successful effort to open peace negotiations in Paris. On Oct. 31, he ordered a complete halt in the bombing, a condition set by Hanoi for substantive discussions between North Vietnam and the Vietcong on one side and the United States and the Saigon Government on the other.

## Understanding Reported

In turn, there was an understanding, officially denied but tacitly acknowledged by Hanoi, that its forces would not shell major cities in the South, take military advantage of the demilitarized zone, which straddles the border between North and South Vietnam, or fire upon unarmed American reconnaissance planes monitoring military activities in the North.

By increments, Mr. Nixon has cut American troops in the South to a level of about 158,000 men, with an announced target of 139,000 by Feb. 1.

In the process, however, he has become more and more reliant on airpower — which can be applied without heavy American casualties and attendant political attacks at home — to sustain not only the South Vietnamese Government, but also the pro-American governments in Cambodia and Laos.

## Report on Bombing Level

A Cornell University study published last month showed that while the over-all intensity of the American air war in Indochina had been cut by about half from the peak of 1968 and 1969, the level was still running at about a million tons of bombs a year. In Laos and Cambodia, the study concluded on the basis of official figures, the bombing has actually been escalated.

Whether the great weight of American airpower will succeed in sustaining the Saigon Government against a determined enemy offensive in the South is unknown, because the enemy has undertaken no major ground actions there since Mr. Nixon took office.

In Cambodia and Laos, however, the use of American airpower has not tipped the balance.

Despite fierce air support, Laotian troops and Thai and tribal mercenaries directed by the Central Intelligence Agency have been crumbling in the face of a North Vietnamese offensive in northeast Laos. A North Vietnamese offensive on the Boleveny Plateau to the south has also made quick progress.

In Cambodia, on the southern flank of South Vietnam, the military situation has also become critical. Again, despite intense American air support, Cambodian troops were routed earlier this month in a series of battles with the North Vietnamese north of Phnompenh.