

U.S. Says Sudden Rains Hampered Bombing Raids

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Enemy Forces Keep Up Shelling of Long Tieng, Laotians' Key Base

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 2—Military sources here say that a "freak weather change" plunged the North Vietnamese coast into fog and rain as the first waves of United States bombers were about to begin last week's raids against North Vietnam, forcing over a third of the attacking planes to turn back.

The sudden shift in weather is being blamed by command officers here for what they describe as the over-all disappointing results of the raids. If the weather had held, the sources say, the raids, which went on for five days, would have lasted less than three full days.

[In Laos, Agence France-Press reported that the enemy continued to shell Long Tieng, the key northern base where American military advisers are directing some 30,000 troops.]

Other reports of the United States command's general dissatisfaction with the bombing are beginning to come to the surface here as experts continue to analyze thousands of aerial photos taken to assess



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Laotian base at Long
Tieng was bombarded by
enemy forces' artillery.

the raids' damage to North Vietnamese airfields, supply dumps and antiaircraft sites.

The five straight days of raids, which began on a Sunday, the day after Christmas, were the most sustained bombing of North Vietnam in more than three years.

The military sources said today that about 150 American fighter-bombers set out just after dawn Sunday after their pilots were told that the weather along the strike area was good.

When they arrived, the sources add, the seasonal fog and rain over the north had closed in and made accurate bombing almost impossible.

All but 46 planes turned back

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without dropping their bombs on target. The sources said that fear of hitting civilian areas was the main reason the jets did not try for their assigned targets.

After the first day, the Air Force and Navy pilots were given new targets and, in many cases, orders to strike other targets several times, the sources said.

This forced the United States command to extend the raids past the two or three days of bombing originally planned, the sources said.

Barracks Were Hit

The sources revealed that American jets did hit North Vietnamese army barracks as they went after nearby airfields and gun sites. It is believed, the sources said, that larger numbers of North Vietnamese soldiers were killed and wounded in the bombing that had been anticipated.

But the officers maintained that the pilots took extreme care to avoid civilian targets, even to the point of aborting one bomber's mission when the pilot could not see the military target clearly enough through the fog and rain.

Air Force sources said tonight that the same bad weather is still hampering the work of the photo-reconnaissance flights over the areas struck. The United States command has promised to provide details of the results of the bombings when the analysis of the pictures is completed.

The command has already disclosed that four airfields and 11 antiaircraft gun, missile and radar sites were bombed during the raids. The antiaircraft sites were "effectively engaged," meaning destroyed, but officials would not give the degree of damage inflicted on the airfields.

The airfields and gun sites were attacked to stem the growing North Vietnamese challenge to the daily American bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and to the fighter-bombers that support Government troops around the Plaine des Jarres in northern Laos.

Other jets struck North Vietnamese supply depots to destroy name supply depots to destroy war matériel destined for enemy troops in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

United States bombing in Laos is viewed as especially important now. The North Vietnamese and their allies, the Pathet Lao guerrillas, recently opened an offensive on several fronts against American-sup-

Nguyen Thanh Le, North Viet

ported Laotian and Meo tribe troops in the Plaine des Jarres and on the Boloven Plateau, in the southern panhandle.