

Photo Flights MAR 6 1972

Bigger Viet Bombing Seen

SAIGON — (CDN) — The U.S. Command reported a total of 11 air raids over North Vietnam in the first four days of this month but American planes bombed targets there at least 34 times during the same period, it was learned today.

Meanwhile the United States has sharply stepped up the number of photo reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam in recent days, informants disclosed.

Sources said "good weather" accounted for the increase. Similar jumps in the number of reconnaissance flights in the past often foreshadowed renewed large-scale bombing of the North by one or two weeks.

The discrepancy between raids reported and actual bombing attacks is the result of an increase in the number of U.S. Air Force and Navy planes taking part in many of the so-called protective reaction raids.

Expanding Raids

In what appears to be a policy of rapidly expanding U.S. bombing raids over the north, an average of four U.S. planes participated in each of seven protective reaction raids between last Wednesday and Saturday, sources disclosed.

Three other strikes involved single planes and a flight of two planes participated in another.

In all, there were 34 attacks during the 11 raids, sources said. In past raids usually one and sometimes two planes were involved.

The increase now is apparently the result of unsuccessful strikes by the smaller number of planes. However, preliminary public reports do not indicate the larger strike forces have been any more successful in their attacks.

Number Withdrawn

So far this year there have been 80 protective reaction raids, including one involving more than 125 air strikes in a single 29-hour period. In all of 1971 there were only 108 such attacks on North Vietnam.

Two raids occurred yesterday but were not reported until today. They both involved Navy planes escorting reconnaissance flights over the north. The Navy refused to say how many planes were involved in those raids.

Targets in all the attacks included anti-aircraft artillery and surface to air missile sites and radar defenses south of the 20th parallel in North Vietnam.

The increase in the number of planes taking part in individual protective reaction raids was not announced but appears to have begun since the first of the

year. Military sources refused even to acknowledge there has been a change.

Concealment

The U.S. Command has stopped saying how many planes are taking part in most of the raids unless they involve only one or two aircraft.

The expanded air activity is concealed in the phrase, "escort aircraft conducted a protective reaction and attacked the site," in daily communiques from the U.S. Command.

Concealment of the expanded raids suggests that other protective reaction figures for this year understate the actual amount of bombing the U.S. is now conducting over North Vietnam.