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U.S. Reports Jet Downed MIG Over North Vietnam

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Saturday, April 1—The United States command announced yesterday that an American fighter-bomber shot down a MIG-21 jet fighter over North Vietnamese territory near the Laotian border Thursday afternoon.

In an incident attesting anew to the intensification of the air war, two American F-4 Phantoms from Thailand, escorting other Air Force planes bombing the Ho Chi Minh supply trail in Laos, intercepted the North Vietnamese MIG as it was flying toward the border near the Bankarai pass. The command said one of the American planes fired a missile that brought down the MIG.

Yesterday the United States military headquarters here announced the loss of the second four-engine AC-130 gunship in two days. North Vietnamese 57-mm. antiaircraft fire hit one of the lumbering planes over the trail late Thursday night. The 15 crew members parachuted to safety and were rescued by helicopter yesterday morning.

The first AC-130, one of a fleet that numbered 18 and is based at Nakon Phanom in Thailand, was shot down Wednesday morning by a Soviet-built surface-to-air missile south of the trail junction point of Tchepone, and its 14 crewmen were presumed lost.

Plane Costs \$7-Million

Until Wednesday the command had never announced the loss of an AC-130, which uses infrared scanners and computers and monitors sensor devices planted in the ground to locate North Vietnamese truck traffic along the trail network and then shoots at the trucks with rapid firing 40-mm cannon from doorways in the fuselage of the airplane under the wing.

The planes—slow-moving turboprop aircraft flying at speeds under 200 miles an hour—are valued at \$7-million each. Besides the two this week, two others were shot down over Laos before 1970. They came into service in 1968.

Until the past few months, North Vietnamese air defenses along the Ho Chi Minh Trail were not an acute threat to American air operations against it—the bulk of the 300 to 400 fighter bomber, gunship, and B-52 missions that are flown in Indochina every day are directed at targets on the Laotian panhandle.

The North Vietnamese have been methodically improving these defenses since the current dry season began last November. They have also been sending their MIG-21 fighter bombers across the border into Laos periodically to scramble American air defenses there and disrupt the slow flying AC-130's, B-52's, and observation planes.

Air Defenses Bolstered

So far this year, American planes have shot down five MIG's. One Air Force F-4 was shot down by a MIG over Laos last December.

Until 1970, enemy surface-to-air missiles were confined to within North Vietnam's borders. This year, however, they have been seen well inside Laos, as far south as 30 miles southwest of Tchepone, which puts them about 60 miles from North Vietnam.

North Vietnamese gunners have increased their defenses of the train network too, with

60 antiaircraft artillery battalions with two to six guns each in southern Laos this year, compared to half that number two years ago. American pilots say their adversaries are also firing at them more frequently and more accurately this year than before.

Almost all the equipment and weapons the North Vietnamese gunners use is provided by the Russians.

The dramatic improvement of North Vietnamese air defenses has prompted the American pilots to make frequent "protective reaction" strikes against North Vietnamese air defense sites along the Laotian-North Vietnamese border.

On Thursday night, two Air Force F-105 fighter bombers protecting B-52 bombers over the Ho Chi Minh Trail fired missiles at two North Vietnamese air defense radar sites across the border, southwest and northwest of Donghoi. One anti-aircraft-artillery radar site was reported to have been destroyed, in the 102d such strike announced this year. This compares with 121 such strikes in all of last year, according to the Pentagon.

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AIR SUPPORT BJT 440
By RICHARD BLYSTONE
Associated Press Writer

OVER HIGHWAY 1, Vietnam AP - The gray sky is so low it is like flying indoors, but the air is full of planes and helicopters trying to slow the North Vietnamese advance below the demilitarized zone.

The roads are full of refugees fleeing south oward Hue.

All Easter morning South Vietnamese Skyraider pilots brought up from the south sat with tight faces in their trailer quarters waiting for the clouds to lift from Da Nang. Vietnamese helicopter pilots cranked up their engines and shut down again as the tower gave them "no go."

"Where do those North Vietnamese get their weather forecasts?" asked an American colonel. "If it hadn't been for this weather they'd have been blowed away by now."

For most of the day the beleaguered bases from the mountains to the caostal plain across South Vietnam's northern sector had only Naval gunfire and jets bombing through the clouds for support.

It was mid-afternoon by the time the helicopters and Skyraiders reached the battlefields.

From the air the fleeing civilian vehicles look like ants filing down the sandy coastal plain. Circles freckle the ground below-shell holes mingling with the grave mounds of peasant ancestors.

There are thousands of refugees, from Gio Ling, Dong Ha, and Quang Tri. This trek is nothing new to them.

They are in cars and trucks, on bikes and motorcycles, crammed into buses with latecomers perched on with the luggage. Many are on foot, belongings slung on their backs or bouncing on the ends of sticks on their shoulders.

Hundreds of trucks crawl up the road toward Quang Tri, carrying ammunition and soldiers. A few have tree branches stuck in their sideboards, apparently for camouflage.

Overhead, American Cobra gunships wheel and dive. Skyraiders drone northward and return. Smoke plumes streak the low horizon and explosions rumble in the distance.

In Quang Tri, refugees crowd around makeshift shelters. But some of the townspeople tend their gardens, and the children look up and applaud the circling helicopters.

Lt. Col. Dang Van Phuoc, commander of the helicopter wing, goes in for a landing. Two shellbursts miss his chopper by a few hundred yards. He heads for another pad. His eyes shine. He does not like sitting behind a desk, he says.

It is too late for Quang Tri base.

On the way back, Phuoc stops at what once was Camp Evans to lecture his squad. A young Skyraider pilot comes up and tells with his hands how the ancient planes knocked out five tanks north of Dong Ha. At least something has been accomplished.

But it is expected to rain again in the morning.

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Reds Call Drive Anti-Nixon

PARIS — (UPI) — Communist diplomatic sources said yesterday the North Vietnamese military offensive in Vietnam was aimed at upsetting President Nixon's plan to turn the fighting over to the South Vietnamese.

The sources blamed the resumption of large scale fighting on American policies, especially Nixon's Vietnamization program and the U.S. action in suspending the Paris Peace talks.

'Contradiction'

According to the sources, the heavy new Communist

attacks point up the "insoluble contradiction" of the Nixon Vietnamization policies replacing American troop units being withdrawn from Vietnam with South Vietnamese forces backed by U.S. logistical and air support.

The new attacks came a few days after North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh outlined the objectives of the Hanoi government in the military, political and diplomatic field to the National

Assembly at its March 20-25 session.

Hanoi Pledge

The Hanoi Premier told the House, according to the French Communist newspaper Humanite, "Our people will liberate the South and reunify the fatherland. No force, no matter how cruel, no maneuver, no matter how perfidious, will be able to prevent our people reaching its objective."

Humanite reported from Hanoi the North Vietnamese leaders were not surprised by the suspension of the

Paris talks. Hanoi leaders are convinced President Nixon adjourned them while trying to reestablish the military situation through intensified air raids, Humanite said.

The Communist daily newspaper said Hanoi leaders are presently persuaded the military situation has swung in favor of the "liberation forces."