

U.S. NOW UNSURE ON SHIP INCIDENT

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Command in Saigon Backs Off on Report That Enemy Craft Damaged Worden

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 18—The United States Command backed off today from Pentagon reports that damage to a guided-missile frigate, the Worden, might have been caused by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin on Sunday.

In a statement issued this afternoon, the command said that one American sailor was killed and nine were wounded aboard the ship in an explosion whose cause was unknown.

"Preliminary reports indicate that the ship was beyond the range of shore batteries," the command said. "We do not know whether fire from enemy vessels may have been involved."

Foe Reported Repulsed

In the ground war, meanwhile, at least two North Vietnamese tanks reportedly pushed into the besieged provincial capital of Anloc, 60 miles north of Saigon, but were beaten back by the South Vietnamese defenders. [Page 16.]

A senior spokesman for the United States command, when asked whether its statement that the cause of the explosion aboard the Worden was not known represented a backing-off from the Pentagon's earlier speculations, replied, "It sure does."

At a Pentagon briefing yesterday, a Defense Department spokesman said on the basis of information from Saigon that "possibly" North Vietnamese motor torpedo boats were involved in the Worden incident but that this had not been confirmed. [Asked on Tuesday about the United States command's statement, the Pentagon spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, said he had "nothing to say beyond what is available in Saigon."]

Informed officers here assert-

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ed that the Seventh Fleet was uncertain of what had actually happened on Sunday and that investigations were under way.

The Command said that a second ship, the guided-missile destroyer Buchanan, was struck by one round from North Vietnamese shore batteries yesterday and that one of her crewmen was killed and seven were wounded.

The Command did not state precisely where either the Worden or the Buchanan was situated when struck. The Worden was believed to have been in the northern part of the Gulf of Tonkin well offshore at the time of the explosion Sunday, and the Buchanan off the coast of the southern panhandle of North Vietnam yesterday when hit.

The Buchanan was engaged in shore bombardment of North Vietnam and suffered damage to the superstructure, a command spokesman said.

The damage to the Worden apparently occurred after the bombing of Haiphong, which

took place in the predawn hours Sunday.

The Worden, completed in 1963, has surface-to-air missiles as well as anti-aircraft guns. Her mission in the gulf was not disclosed by the command, but apparently she was there either to provide anti-aircraft protection for the three aircraft carriers now stationed in the gulf or for rescue operations in case American planes were shot down.

The Buchanan, a smaller ship that has long-range, rapid-firing 5-inch guns as well as surface-to-air missiles, can provide anti-aircraft protection and can bombard the shore.

She is part of a flotilla of American warships that has been engaged, together with Navy and Air Force jet fighter-bombers and B-52's, in bombing military targets in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam, between the demilitarized zone and the 20th Parallel.

The United States command said that it had "no further details to add" to the sketchy statements about the two damaged ships.