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U.S. Officials in Saigon Report Bombing Cutback

Associated Press

Saigon

Despite perfect weather and a multitude of prime military targets, the United States has sharply curtailed its bombing of North Vietnam and put the Hanoi-Haiphong heartland off limits to aerial raiders, U.S. military sources here said yesterday.

One source noted that raids are now running at less than a dozen a day following the huge raids Sunday that included the Hanoi and Haiphong areas.

The curtailment, "to feel Hanoi out," as one inform-

ant said, came as Hanoi's delegation to the Paris peace talks said Monday that, if the bombing stopped, it was ready to start secret negotiations on ending the war.

War communiques showed the ground war in the South to have dwindled dramatically. There were no major battles reported.

Military sources here said the President has now restricted bombing to targets below the 20th Parallel, 60 miles south of Hanoi and Haiphong. Sunday's raids around those cities are termed "a one-shot deal," at least for now, by U. S. military sources.

(But Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said in Washington there was "no substance" to the report of bombing restrictions. A White House spokesman said this was the authorized official position.)

However, informants here said they stuck to the position that Mr. Nixon had ordered the bombing restrictions.

It appeared possible that Washington's public position might, as it often has in the past, mask behind-the-scenes moves. One possibility was that without a public threat to resume full-scale bombing unless Hanoi calls off its offensive, the North Vietnamese could do so without losing face.

The U. S. command declined to comment officially on the report of sharply curtailed bombing in the North and repeated a statement issued when the bombing there was resumed April 6 that bombing in the demilitarized zone and north and south of it were under way.

Informed military sources here said that from a tactical standpoint it did not make sense to hit the North

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Vietnamese heartland with hundreds of attacks, then suddenly drop down to a handful in the southern-most provinces.

"But this is not a military situation," one source said. "The tactical part of it is not of primary importance. This is a political thing. The President is trying to feel out what North Vietnam is going to do. It takes time to find out what the other side is going to do. The signs are not that clear."

While action was curtailed in the North, U.S. bombers intensified their attacks against North Vietnamese positions in South Vietnam, making more than 1000 attacks Monday and Tuesday.

The U.S. command announced the loss of three aircraft in the South.

Four American crewmen and two South Korean soldiers were killed when an Army helicopter crashed on the central coast while supporting Korean forces.

A four-engine C-130 transport plane was hit by enemy fire while trying to resupply the embattled provincial capital of An Loc, 60 miles north of Saigon. It crashed 25 miles from Saigon. All six crewmen were rescued, two of them injured.

An Army helicopter was shot down 32 miles southwest of Da Nang, but both crewmen escaped uninjured.

CAMBODIA

By far the most dramatic ground action in Indochina was centered around the temple ruins of Angkor Wat

in Cambodia's northwest.

North Vietnamese troops swarmed toward a Cambodian relief column trying to reach a 1000-man government force trapped near the temples. A military spokesman said the attacks were "very fierce," and there were indications the relief column now was surrounded, too. The imperiled government soldiers are part of a drive to encircle the Angkor Wat complex which has been in North Vietnamese hands for two years.

In Vietnam, a senior U. S. adviser said that although there is an over-all lull in fighting below the demilitarized zone on the northern front, North Vietnamese troops are believed still under orders to press their offensive.

AN LOC

On the southern front, Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Minh, commander of South Vietnamese forces in the Saigon region, said the first critical phase of fighting around the provincial capital of An Loc has passed.

But he said he anticipated a second series of attacks along the corridor north of Saigon as the North Vietnamese seek to capture An Loc and set up a capital there for the Viet Cong's provisional revolutionary government.

Minh said his troops control most of An Loc, 60 miles north of Saigon, after a week of heavy fighting.

Field reports said new fighting broke out in the northern section of the city.