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With Air War Widening, U.S. Air Power Surges

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WASHINGTON, June 9— President Nixon has nearly doubled Air Force fighter-bomber strength in Southeast Asia and tripled the number of aircraft carriers, and he is quadrupling the force of B-52 Stratofortresses there.

The Air Force's 18-plane F-4 Phantom squadrons at bases in Thailand and at Danang, in northern South Vietnam, have gone to 21 from 11.

The attack aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin have increased from two to six, with an average of 65 fighter-bombers to a carrier. A seventh, the antisubmarine carrier Ticonderoga, is on patrol duty. More than 40 destroyers and cruisers, the largest such task force in recent memory, are protecting the carriers and hurling shells at enemy positions along the coasts.

Two more attack carriers, the America and the Oriskany, have sailed for the Gulf of Tonkin, although it

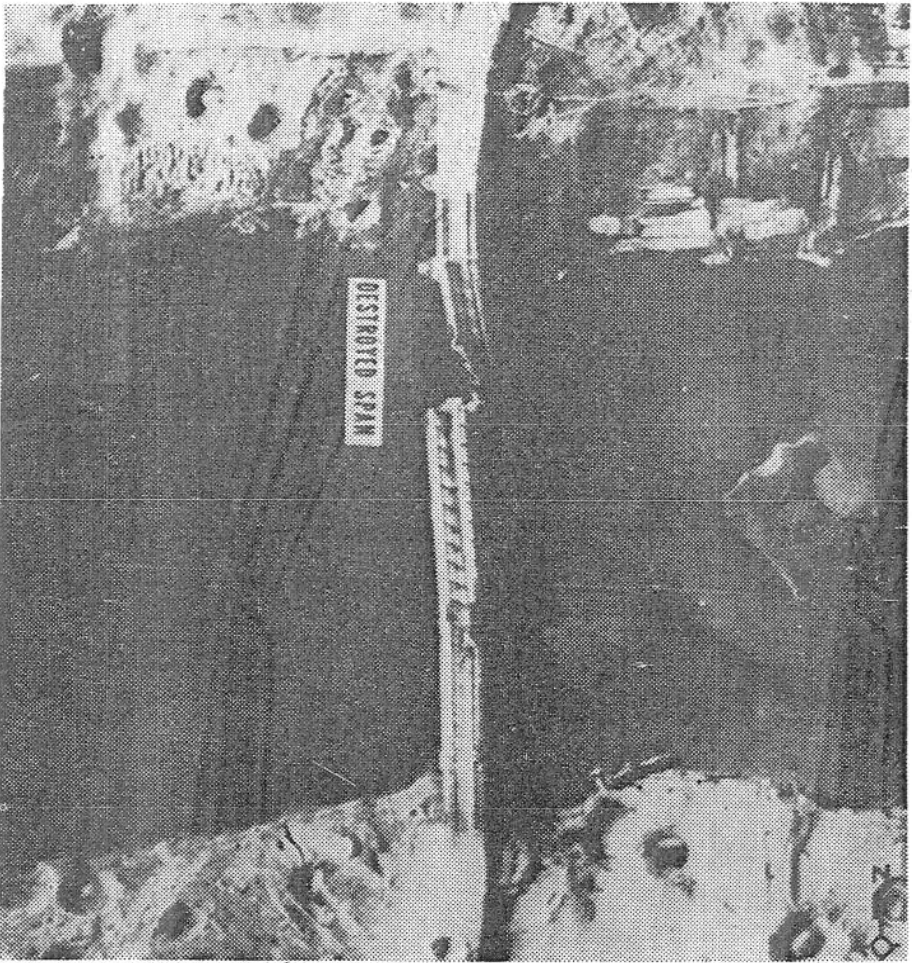
is still undetermined whether they will relieve carriers on station.

The B-52 force has climbed from 45 planes stationed in southern Thailand at the beginning of the year to about 145 there and on Guam. More are being added and the figure is expected to reach 190—almost half the B-52's in the Air Force—by mid-June.

The number of men involved is unavailable, but it is estimated at 40,000 to 60,000 if support personnel at bases on Okinawa and in the Philippines are included.

About two-thirds of the attack sorties against the North are being flown by Navy planes because of the heavy commitment of the Air Force to the battlefields in the South.

In April about 1,900 sorties were launched by both services against northern targets. By the end of May the number was 5,400, but the rate is not at peak reached in 1967, when an average of 8,000 sorties a month were flown.



NORTH VIETNAMESE BRIDGE IS HIT: Photo released Thursday is said to show railroad and highway bridge at Dong Phong Thuong, near Thanhhoa, damaged after U.S. raid on May 27. A Pentagon official said bombing has nearly stopped rail traffic in the area.

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