

Navy Says a Task Force Raided the Haiphong Area

AUG 30 1972

? Enemy Torpedo Boats Reported Destroyed in Unusual Operation

NYTimes
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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Aug. 29—A four-ship American task force, with the commander of the Seventh Fleet along, conducted a raid on the Haiphong port area after dark on Sunday, shelling targets within two miles of the Haiphong city limits, the Navy command announced here today.

The ships came under heavy fire from North Vietnamese coastal batteries, the Navy reported, and some shells landed within 30 feet of one of the vessels, the guided-missile destroyer Robison, spraying shrapnel onto its signal bridge. But the Navy said none of the vessels were hit and there were no casualties.

The Navy also reported that, just as the raid was ending and the American ships were pulling away, two North Vietnamese patrol torpedo boats suddenly appeared and at high speed set out in pursuit of the task force. The Navy said the heavy cruiser Newport News



Associated Press

Vice Adm. J. L. Holloway 3d, the fleet commander.



The New York Times/Aus. 30, 1972

Continued on Page 15, Column 1

U.S. Navy Reports Task Force Raided the Haiphong Port Area

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

turned its guns on them, sinking one of them.

Shells from a destroyer, the Rowan, hit the other, setting it ablaze. The burning craft was later destroyed as it headed for the beach by bombs from an A-7 Corsair jet, one of the planes flying support for the mission, the Navy reported.

The clash with the torpedo boats occurred 27 miles south-east of Haiphong at a point about 9 or 10 miles off the coast, the Navy said. The torpedo boats were described as 85-foot craft, with a maximum speed of 45 knots. Each was armed with two twin 25-mm antiaircraft guns and two 21-inch torpedo tubes, the Navy reported.

There was "no indication," the Navy said, that the patrol boats had opened fire with their guns or torpedoes before they were hit.

Second Such Raid in War

The American attack on the harbor was only the second such reported raid of the Vietnam war. The first occurred three and a half months ago, on May 10, just a day before the mines dropped by American planes at the entrance to Haiphong harbor were activated. The mining was one of the Nixon Administration's responses to the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam, which began March 30.

The first Navy raid on Haiphong was conducted by five ships—three cruisers and two destroyers.

The four ships involved in the raid last Sunday included the guided missile light cruiser Providence besides the heavy cruiser Newport News and the destroyers Rowan and Robison.

Although these ships obviously stayed clear of the minefield, the Navy would not disclose how far offshore they stood as they shelled the Haiphong area, except to say that it was "a few miles."

The eight-inch guns of the Newport News have a range of 15 miles. The six-inch and five-inch guns of the other ships have ranges from 7 to 12 miles.

Gun Sites Are Targets

The Navy, in a communiqué, reported that several targets were hit, including the Catbi fuel storage area two miles southeast of Haiphong and the Doston army barracks complex 11 miles south-southeast of the city. The communiqué also said that several coastal gun sites were hit and reported "secondary" explosions in many target

areas. It gave no other details on the extent of the damage or the number of casualties caused in the barracks area.

The commander of the seventh fleet, Vice Adm. J. L. Holloway 3d, who was aboard the Newport News during the attack, called it a "daring raid into strongly defended enemy territory." In a message sent after the mission to the men of the Newport News and the three other ships involved, he said: "The enemy has once again been reminded of the mobility of the fleet. It was inspiring to steam into combat with a unit such as this."

The two-day gap between the raid and its announcement was somewhat unusual. The Seventh Fleet, which has assembled a 60-ship armada off the Vietnam coast, normally announces the raids conducted by its ships and carrier planes the day after they happen.

Increased Pressure Seen

The Navy information office here said it did not get the information in time for yesterday's communiqué, but the delay stirred some speculation that the Navy wanted its own separate headlines. Sunday was a day of some of the heaviest bombing raids to date on the Haiphong area, and these were the focus of yesterday's war news out of Saigon.

As to the reason for the naval raid on Haiphong at this time, there was some speculation that it might signal an increase in pressure on North Vietnam's main port city, but a Seventh Fleet spokesman cautioned against "reading too much into it."

"There are a lot of considerations that go into a mission," the spokesman said. "Maybe it was felt that the best and least risky way to hit these targets was with the guns of cruisers standing several miles away rather than have planes fly over with bombs and risk heavy antiaircraft and missile fire."

In reply to questions, the spokesman said there was no connection between the Sunday raid and the Chinese minesweeper that recently slipped through the American mines and is now anchored inside Haiphong harbor. He said there was still no sign that the minesweeper had attempted to clear any of the mines at the entrance to the port. The minesweeper is the first seagoing vessel reported to have entered the harbor since the mines were laid.